



**COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES  
Chief Administrative Office  
Service Integration Branch**

# **Sanctioned Participants and the Challenge of Meeting Welfare-to-Work Requirements in the Era of TANF Reauthorization**

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## **PREFACE**

This report concludes a process initiated in 2003 when the Commission for Public Social Services informed the Board of Supervisors of the need for systematic information on sanctioned Welfare-to-Work participants. The Department of Public Social Services and the Research and Evaluation Services (RES) within the CAO subsequently created a research plan for a far reaching study of sanctions and the County's sanctioned Welfare-to-Work population. The first of the two-part RES/DPSS sanctions study was released to the Board in March 2005.

DPSS followed its public release of the first sanctions study with the formation of the Partner's Work Group, consisting of the Commission, DPSS managers and other program stakeholders. The Work Group was charged with creating an Action Plan that would use the findings and recommendations in the sanction report as the basis for a series of policy enhancements designed to lower the sanction rate in the County. To date, DPSS has implemented a number of the measures articulated in the Work Group's Action Plan.

Part I of the sanctions study, which covered the period from April 2002 to February 2004, described the sanctions process, identified the sanction rates in the County of Los Angeles, and looked at factors associated with sanctions and noncompliance. The present report (Part II) covers the period from the start of 2004 to the start of 2006, and looks in greater detail at the internal composition of the County's sanctioned population and generally finds that chronically sanctioned Welfare-to-Work participants—i.e. those that become sanctioned numerous times or remain sanctioned for relatively long periods of time—are the key component of the County's sanctioned population. By extension, this report suggests that future efforts to boost program participation and lower sanction rates in the County should focus on this chronically sanctioned segment, which, as this report also shows, consists of the most vulnerable Welfare-to-Work participants.

Chapter 1 of this report provides background information and presents the reader with the research questions guiding the analyses that follow. Chapter 2, which is based on analyses of administrative records, looks at recent trends in sanctions and noncompliance. Chapter 3 draws on survey data and administrative records in an effort to provide a better understanding of factors associated with chronic sanctions. Chapter 4 is based on focus group interviews and offers a qualitative understanding of chronic sanctions and issues related to difficulties participants have in meeting program requirements. Chapter 5 summarizes the findings from this report and offers a series of policy recommendations. These findings and recommendations will further assist DPSS in its continuing efforts to promote Welfare-to-Work participation and reduce sanctions, both of which are critically important in light of the new work participation regulations Congress has written into the TANF reauthorization legislation.

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# **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

## **Overview**

This report is the second in a two-part study of Welfare-to-Work sanctions in the County of Los Angeles. In September 2003, the Commission for Public Social Services submitted a report to the Board of Supervisors citing the need for information on sanctioned participants in the California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) program. In response to the Commission's report, the Department of Public Social Services (DPSS) contracted with the Research and Evaluation Services (RES) unit within the Chief Administrative Office (CAO) to produce a study of sanctions and the sanctioned Welfare-to-Work population, the purpose of which would be to provide information that could guide policy enhancements designed to reduce the County's sanction rate and boost compliance with Welfare-to-Work rules. The DPSS/RES sanctions research plan, which was submitted to the Board in January 2004, divided the Sanctions Study into two parts. The first of the two reports, "Study of Sanctions among CalWORKs Participants in the County of Los Angeles: Who, When and Why?" was submitted to the Board in March 2005.

Among the most critical information presented in Part I of the Sanctions Study, two sets of findings stand out in particular. The first is that the average monthly sanction rate during the period over which RES conducted its investigations (April 2002 to February 2004) was approximately 25 percent. This was corroborated with the finding that approximately one quarter of the participants in the study's entry cohort were at risk of being sanctioned after 18 months of entering the Welfare-to-Work program. The second set of crucial findings was connected to the immediate reasons for sanctions. The report, which studied only first-time sanctions, found that the majority of sanctioned participants in the County become sanctioned fairly quickly, before ever participating in any Welfare-to-Work activities. Closer analysis found that failure to attend the Orientation session, which itself has a number of different possible causes in each case, was the most common reason Welfare-to-Work participants become sanctioned. Moreover, while sanctioned participants tend to become sanctioned quickly after entering into the Welfare-to-Work program, they also tend to cure their sanctions relatively quickly.

## **The Partner's Work Group**

Based on the findings and recommendations provided in the first sanctions report, DPSS formed the Partner's Work Group, which not only included DPSS managers but also the Commission for Public Social Services, community advocates, service providers, and stakeholders from other County departments. Although the first sanctions report revealed that the sanction rates in the County of Los Angeles are not drastically different from rates found in comparable counties in the State, DPSS submitted a Sanctions Action Plan to the Board in August 2005. The Action Plan provided a series of potential policy enhancements, a number of which have since been implemented, designed to boost compliance with Welfare-to-Work requirements and lower the County's sanction rate.

Given the first sanction report's findings on the importance of attendance at Orientation in determining whether Welfare-to-Work participants become sanctioned, the Work Group has paid special attention to the question of how to further encourage participants to complete Orientation sessions.

### **The Present Report: Sources, Methods and General Areas of Inquiry**

The present report looks at more recent sanctions trends in the County of Los Angeles and provides a closer examination of the internal composition of the sanctioned population and the factors that offer the best explanations for why particular kinds of participants fail to comply with Welfare-to-Work program requirements. In particular, this report evaluates the roles in the sanction process played by participant knowledge of their sanction status and of program rules and regulations, as well as by participant hardships, program-level and person-level barriers to compliance, household size, and participant compliance histories. The analyses in this report are limited to participants who entered the Welfare-to-Work program after 2002 and, as such, do not include participants who entered CalWORKs prior to welfare reform. It is important to note this limitation because pre-reform participants still comprised half the long-term sanction population at the end of 2005.

Like Part I of the Sanctions Study, this report draws its conclusions using quantitative methods, including multivariate analysis, to examine administrative records and participant survey data, and qualitative methods to study focus group interviews conducted with program participants. Policy recommendations based on these conclusions are offered in the final chapter of this report. The recommendations are made for the purposes of boosting participation in Welfare-to-Work components, lowering the County's sanction rates, and helping the County to meet the new work participation requirements inscribed in the reauthorized Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) legislation.

### **Key Findings: Recent Dynamics in Sanctions and Compliance**

The first sanction report looked almost exclusively at first-time sanctions. The main focus of this report, by contrast, is participants who have been sanctioned multiple times and/or participants who have remained sanctioned for six months or more. This focus on "chronically sanctioned" Welfare-to-Work participants is an outgrowth of one of RES's central findings, namely that the rising monthly sanction rate over much of the period covered in this report was not a function of an increase in newly sanctioned participants. The key trends and dynamics in this report are as follows:

- While the County's quarterly number of sanctions declined between the start of 2004 and the end of 2005 (from 22,000 to 20,700), the monthly sanction rate continued to increase between February 2004 and the summer of 2005. This increasing sanction rate was not a function of more frequent noncompliance but instead partly an effect of a decline in participants who enrolled in Welfare-to-Work activities, from 67,000 at the start of 2004 to 49,000 by the end of 2005.

- Over the same period, in fact, the rate of noncompliance increased at first but then returned to its initial level. At the same time, noncompliant participants became increasingly less likely to become sanctioned starting in late 2004, and by September 2005 the proportion of non-compliant participants who became sanctioned within three months after their non-compliance fell by more than eight percentage points. DPSS has therefore had increasing success in returning noncompliant participants to compliance before sanctions are imposed. As a result of these positive developments, the sanction rate, as well as the number of sanctioned participants, has declined throughout 2006. As of the end of August 2006, the sanction rate has dropped to 28 percent, down from the peak of 31 percent it had reached in the summer of 2005, and during the first half of 2006 the number of sanctioned participants dropped by 15 percent to approximately 17,000. The most recent data on sanctions, which became available after the completion of this study, are presented in the Epilogue to this report.
- While the proportion of Welfare-to-Work participants who became sanctioned for the first time dropped from 14 percent to 9 percent between April 2004 and February 2006, the proportion of the sanctioned population in any given month that was sanctioned more than once increased from 34 to 48 percent between the start of 2004 and the end of 2005.
- Between January 2004 and the start of 2006, average sanction durations increased from 11 months to 16 months. Moreover, by comparison with participants who remain sanctioned for relatively short periods of time, long-term sanction participants (i.e. participants who remain in sanction status for six months or more) have represented a growing share of the sanctioned population, reaching two-thirds of this population by December 2005.

Combined with the decline in new participants enrolled in GAIN, then, the proportional increase in chronically sanctioned Welfare-to-Work participants—i.e. increases in the relative shares of participants who are sanctioned numerous times and/or for long periods of time—is the motive force behind the recent growth in the County’s sanction rates.

## **Key Findings: Explaining Chronic Sanctions**

Long-term sanction participants (those sanctioned for six months or more) can be added to participants with multiple sanctions (those with more than one sanction during the study period) to create a combined category called *chronically sanctioned* participants (though it is important to remember that long-term sanction participants and participants with multiple sanctions overlap to a great extent). By December 2005, the number of chronically sanctioned participants exceeded 17,000, which was 83 percent of all sanctioned participants in that month. This report identifies the factors that explain chronic sanctions by comparing chronically sanctioned participants with participants who have never been sanctioned and participants who have

experienced only short-term sanctions (single sanctions lasting less than six months). The key explanatory findings offered in this report are as follows:

- Chronically sanctioned participants tend to have more educational deficits than never sanctioned and short-term sanction participants. A significantly higher proportion of chronically sanctioned survey respondents had less than a high school education when compared with never sanctioned participants (37 percent versus 32 percent), and a lower proportion of chronically sanctioned participants than never sanctioned participants had some college or more (28 percent versus 35 percent). Multivariate analysis further reveals that the lack of a high school degree increases the likelihood of becoming chronically sanctioned by 35 percent.
- Each respondent in the focus group consisting of participants sanctioned for long periods of time said they took a sanction, thereby losing the adult portion of their CalWORKs cash aid, because of what they felt to be overwhelming caretaking responsibilities for members of their families. They had caretaking responsibilities in a time of family crisis, needs to protect children in dangerous neighborhoods, or fears about leaving their children with strangers.
- A higher proportion of chronically sanctioned participants are unemployed. Slightly more than two-fifths of the chronically sanctioned survey respondents, versus 57 percent of never sanctioned respondents and 52 percent of short-term sanction respondents, reported that they were currently employed or employed in the last 12 months.
- Chronically sanctioned participants tend to work in relatively unstable, low-skill, low-paying jobs. In connection with this, Welfare-to-Work participants earning an hourly wage of less than \$8 are 55 percent more likely to be chronically sanctioned than never sanctioned and 59 percent more likely to be chronically sanctioned than to be short-term sanction participants.
- Survey results and analysis of administrative records indicate that chronically sanctioned participants use specialized supportive services (services designed to help participants with issues related to substance abuse, mental health and domestic violence) much less frequently than either never sanctioned or short-term sanction participants.
- Multivariate analysis further shows that the odds of becoming chronically sanctioned are cut in half if a participant receives specialized supportive services, even in cases where the comparison is limited only to sanctioned participants.
- Analysis of administrative data revealed that episodes of homelessness and housing instability were observed in higher proportions among chronically sanctioned participants. Almost one out of five of the observed chronically

sanctioned participants was identified as having an episode of homelessness, versus 14 percent of the never sanctioned participants. Moreover, almost half of the chronically sanctioned participants observed for this report moved more than once over the previous two years, and one quarter moved more than twice over the same period. These proportions were significantly lower for never sanctioned participants relative to chronically sanctioned participants and short-term sanction participants.

- In comparing chronically sanctioned, never sanctioned and short-term sanction survey respondents, utilization of child care assistance is lowest among those who are chronically sanctioned. Chronically sanctioned participants are 61 percent more likely than never sanctioned participants to have unmet child care needs. In addition, multivariate analysis also shows that the risk of becoming chronically sanctioned after an initial sanction increases considerably if child care problems exist.
- Comments participants made in focus group interviews pointed to a number of problems participants have in accessing transportation services. Transportation barriers often impede participants from taking part in program components such as Job Club, and their inability to participate in these components can frequently lead to sanctions.
- Survey results additionally indicated that transportation problems prevented a significantly higher proportion of chronically sanctioned participants from working when compared to never sanctioned participants. Moreover, chronically sanctioned participants are 2.5 times more likely than never sanctioned participants to have unmet transportation needs.
- Data shows that participants coming from larger households are more likely to become chronically sanctioned. Each additional aided person in a Welfare-to-Work household increases the odds of a participant becoming chronically sanctioned by 27 percent. Moreover, participants coming from households with more than five persons are 32 percent more likely to become chronically sanctioned relative to participants from households with 4 to 5 persons.
- Survey results indicate that 40 percent of the chronically sanctioned respondents either did not know why they were sanctioned or if they were sanctioned. Related to this, multivariate analysis shows that chronically sanctioned participants are 20 percent more likely than never sanctioned participants to report having difficulties reaching their GAIN Services Workers (GSWs).
- Focus group findings further suggest that many sanctions may be related to communication problems, such as lack of notification and knowledge about the program and inconsistent guidance for accessing knowledge about

requirements and services. Some of these problems, like proper notification, are related to computer glitches and technical issues. Others are related to inadequate communication between GSWs and Eligibility Workers (EWs) and between these caseworkers and participants. Many participants speaking in focus groups complained about the difficulties involved in contacting GSWs and frequent GSW turnover.

## **Focusing on the Most Vulnerable Participants**

The information and analysis provided in this report strongly suggests that the County's future efforts to boost Welfare-to-Work participation and lower sanction rates must focus, in large part, on chronically sanctioned participants—that is, participants who, for a variety of often interconnected reasons, have the most difficulty complying with program requirements. In working to enhance the capacities of the chronically sanctioned population, the County would be placing additional emphasis on the most vulnerable Welfare-to-Work participants. These are participants faced with disproportionate deficits in education, work skills and earning power, and struggling with a variety of person-level and program-level barriers. An increased commitment to this population would present a number of difficult but worthwhile challenges.

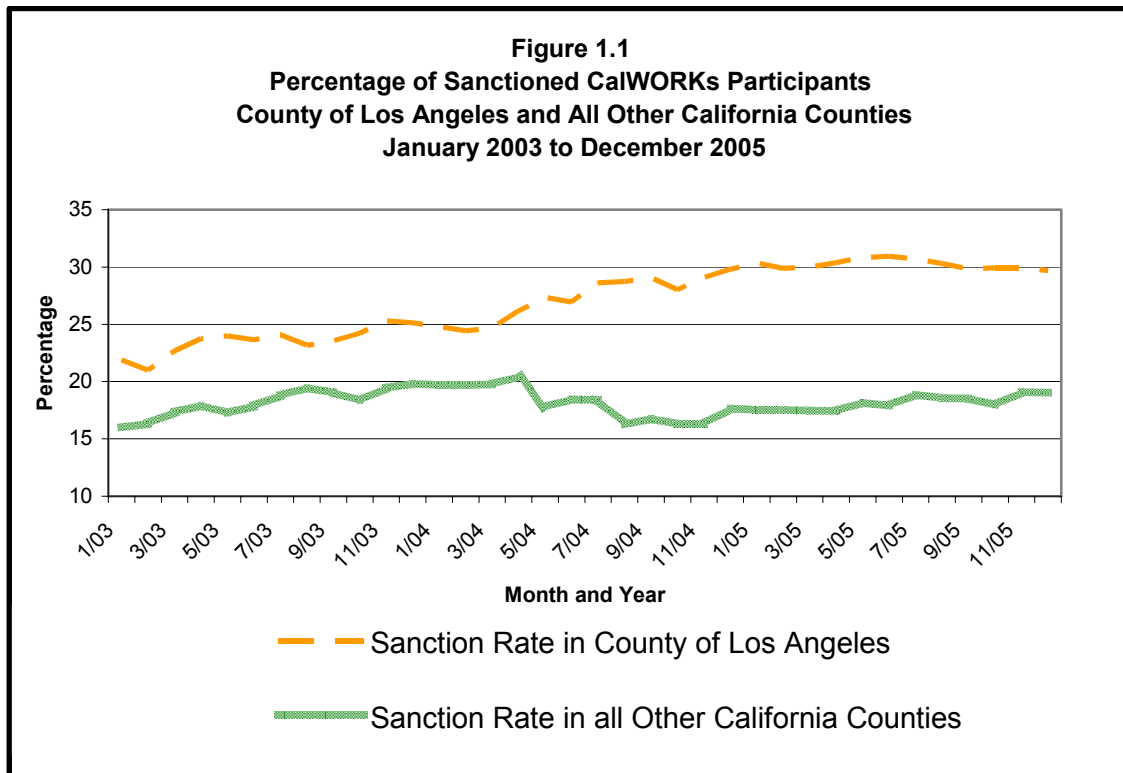
# **CHAPTER 1**

## **Introduction**

### **Background**

Parents who apply for welfare assistance in California enroll in the California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) program. In the County of Los Angeles, the mandatory Welfare-to-Work component of CalWORKs is known as the Greater Avenues to Independence (GAIN) program. GAIN participants who fail to meet program requirements are subject to financial penalties in the form of deductions from the adult portion of their cash assistance, which are restored after participants return to compliance. These penalties, referred to as 'sanctions', have been a topic of ongoing interest to policymakers at the Department of Public Social Services (DPSS) over the last several years. In March 2005, DPSS and the Research and Evaluation Services (RES) unit within the Chief Administrative Office (CAO) released a report to the Board of Supervisors on sanctions and the sanctioned Welfare-to-Work population in the County of Los Angeles.<sup>1</sup> The sanctions report, written in response to recommendations made by the Commission for Public Social Services on the need for systematic information on sanctions, was the first part of a planned two-part study.

Sanctions have been an area of ongoing concern for DPSS, as well as for stakeholders in other County departments and welfare advocates, in part because monthly sanction rates for County of Los Angeles grew considerably between the start of 2003 and the end of 2005. Moreover, as the proportion of sanctioned participants in the County has grown, the difference between the County's monthly sanction rate and the combined monthly sanction rate for all other counties in the State of California increased from 4 percentage points in February 2004 to 13 percentage points by mid-2005 (Figure 1.1).



Source: CDSS data reports CW-25 and CW-25A, January 2003 to December 2005.

## Sanctions Study, Part I: Key Findings

Due to the wide array of important questions related to Welfare-to-Work sanctions and noncompliance in the County of Los Angeles, DPSS and RES opted to break the sanctions study down into two separate reports. Part I of the study, released in March 2005, looked at the monthly sanction rates and the incidence and duration of sanctions, as well as the predictors of sanctions and barriers to participant compliance, the length of time it typically takes participants to become sanctioned and to cure sanctions, the point within the GAIN program at which participants tend to become sanctioned, and the manner in which GAIN Service Workers (GSWs) implement sanctions policy. The report focused on participants who become sanctioned for the first time following their enrollment in GAIN, and only first sanction episodes were studied. The report's most crucial findings were as follows:

- The monthly sanction rate in the County fluctuated between a low of 17 percent in April 2002 and a high of 24 percent in February 2004. Moreover, approximately 25 percent of the participants in the study's entry cohort were at risk of being sanctioned within 18 months after entering the GAIN program.
- Most sanctioned participants are sanctioned before participating in any Welfare-to-Work activity.



- Among participants who complete Orientation, utilization of non-specialized supportive services, such as child care services and transportation, reduces the risk of being sanctioned by 40 percent.
- One out of five sanctioned participants stayed in the GAIN program one year after receiving their first sanction.
- The majority of sanctioned participants cured their sanctions within three months.
- The most frequently cited reasons why participants fail to show up for GAIN Orientation are the lack of adequate transportation and child care, and failure to receive appointment letters on time.

## **The Partner's Work Group**

In response to the findings and recommendations offered in Part I of the Sanctions Study, DPSS initiated a collaborative process to develop a Sanctions Action Plan. This Action Plan articulated a series of strategic steps designed to reduce Welfare-to-Work sanctions in the County of Los Angeles. The Partner's Work Group included DPSS managers, stakeholders from various County departments, advocates, service providers, and the Commission for Public Social Services. The Work Group's Action Plan was submitted to the Board of Supervisors on August 18, 2005, and it provides a variety of short-term, mid-term and long-term program and operational enhancements, including modifications to departmental computer systems, additional training for participants, improved access to child care services, additional operational tools for GAIN staff, and an enterprising outreach program, the implementation of which will inform and provide GAIN participants with intensive services designed to remove barriers to program participation. To date the majority of the short-term and mid-term solutions to reduce GAIN sanctions have been implemented by the Department.

## **The Present Report: Sanctions Study, Part II**

### **Chronically Sanctioned GAIN Participants**

One of the most difficult lingering challenges DPSS faces in connection with GAIN sanctions is the issue of participants who have ongoing difficulties in complying with Welfare-to-Work requirements, i.e. participants who are sanctioned multiple times and/or remain in sanctioned status for relatively long periods of time. The present report, which represents the second part of the two-part RES sanctions study, concentrates on these 'chronically sanctioned' GAIN participants. In focusing on the portion of the County's Welfare-to-Work population that has the most difficulty in complying with program requirements, the analyses offered in this report will enable policymakers to take further measures designed to boost compliance with the GAIN program. The goal of increasing Welfare-to-Work participation is particularly important given the new work requirements written into the TANF reauthorization legislation

passed by Congress earlier this year. Unlike the previous regulations, states are now required to include sanctioned parents in the denominator used to calculate participation rates. This may have a measurable effect on participation rates, and may cause States and local governments to face financial penalties for falling below pre-set participation targets.

## **Data Sources and the Chapters of This Report**

This report draws on analyses of DPSS administrative records, as well as a survey and focus group interviews, both of which were conducted with various types of GAIN participants in the County of Los Angeles. The next chapter (Chapter 2), which is based primarily on analysis of administrative records, looks at recent trends in rates of sanctions and noncompliance and also focuses on the proportion of the County's Welfare-to-Work population that is chronically sanctioned. Chapter 3 examines and links administrative records and participant survey data in order to generate information about factors associated with chronic sanctions. In particular, Chapter 3 looks at the barriers to compliance faced by chronically sanctioned participants and addresses the issue of the extent to which these participants know and understand program rules and regulations. In addition, Chapter 3 attempts to show the most powerful predictors of chronic sanctions. Chapter 4, which is based on an analysis of focus group interviews conducted with various types of sanctioned CalWORKs participants and CalWORKs leavers, offers a qualitative perspective on sanctions that complements the qualitative information offered in the previous chapters. Chapter 5, the concluding chapter of the report, summarizes the report's key findings and offers a series of policy recommendations based on these findings.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **Recent Trends in Sanctions and Noncompliance**

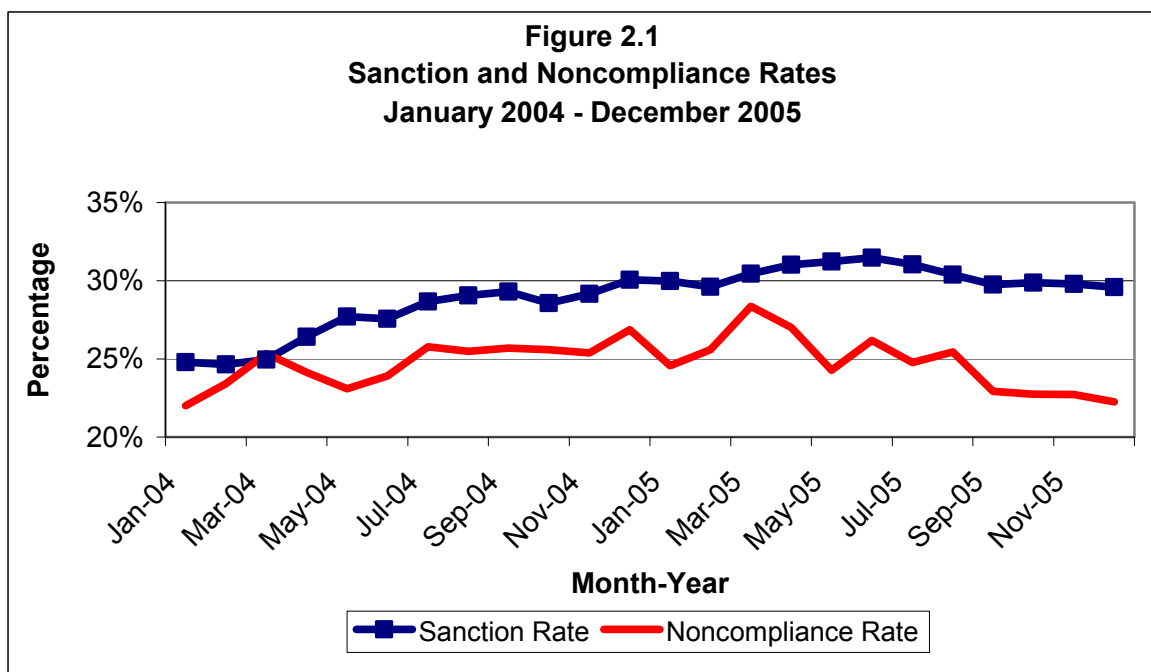
#### **Linking Report I and Report II**

This chapter updates and builds on findings presented in Part I of the RES sanctions study. The previous sanctions report examined first-time sanction episodes and found that approximately one in four participants entering the GAIN program in the County of Los Angeles become sanctioned within one year. The report additionally found that most first-time sanctions are the result of participants missing their Orientation session, which is a relatively easy type of noncompliance to correct. For these reasons, sanctioned GAIN participants tend to become sanctioned quickly, but also tend to cure sanctions quickly. The analysis provided in the present chapter begins by looking at trends and patterns in sanctions and noncompliance since the end of the study period observed in Part I of the sanctions study (April 2002 to February 2004), and then examines ‘chronically sanctioned’ GAIN participants—namely, participants who are sanctioned multiple times and/or remain sanctioned for long periods of time (i.e. six months or more). It is important in this context to point out that, throughout the period RES examined for this study, compliance rules, which have since been modified, stipulated that a first-time sanction would continue until the participant was in compliance; sanctions for second violations lasted at least three months or until the participant was in compliance, whichever was longer; and sanctions for third and all subsequent violations lasted for six months or until the participant was in compliance, whichever was longer. The Human Services Trailer Bill (AB1808) signed by the Governor on July 12, 2006, made some important statutory changes regarding the length of CalWORKs sanctions, but these changes are not applicable to the outcomes examined in this report. Under the new provisions enacted by AB 1808, CalWORKs participants who have more than one sanction incident will be able to return to the program at any point in time after they perform the activity or activities they previously failed to perform.

#### **Sanction Rates and Frequency of Sanctions Revisited**

Part I of the sanctions study showed that the monthly sanction rate in the County of Los Angeles fluctuated between a low of 17 percent in April 2002 and a high of 24 percent in February 2004, which was the end of the study period analyzed in the report. Therefore, the first issue to be addressed in this chapter is how monthly sanction rates have grown or declined since the beginning of 2004. Figure 2.1 shows that the monthly sanction rate increased from just below 25 percent in January 2004 to 31.5 percent by June 2005, and then dropped to just below 30 percent by December 2005.<sup>2</sup> The sanction rate continued to decrease throughout 2006. The most recent data on sanctions that became available after the completion of this study are presented in the Epilogue to this report.

Figure 2.1 also shows the trend in the rate of noncompliance for County of Los Angeles and indicates that this rate increased from 22 percent to 28 percent between January 2004 and March 2005, but then dropped steadily over the following year, returning to 22 percent by the start of 2006.<sup>3</sup> While the sanction rate therefore increased and then stabilized at a higher rate over this two-year period, the noncompliance rate first increased but then returned roughly to its initial level.



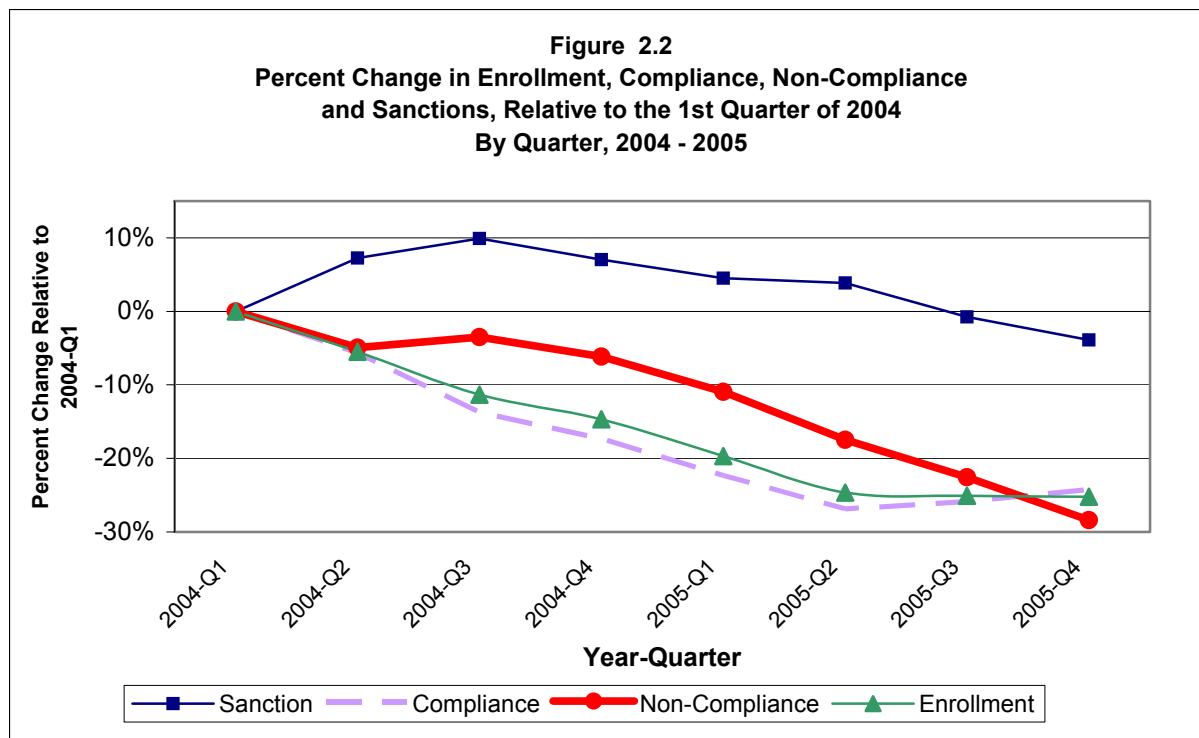
Source: GEARS January 2004-December 2005.

Figure 2.2 provides percentage changes, relative to the first quarter of 2004, and through the last quarter of 2005, for the number of GAIN participants enrolled, compliant, noncompliant and sanctioned.<sup>4</sup> After a pronounced increase between the first and third quarters of 2004, the number of quarterly sanctions in the County of Los Angeles declined between the third quarter of 2004 and the fourth quarter of 2005.

The declining quarterly sanction tallies represented in Figure 2.2 are especially noteworthy given the increase in the sanction rate over the same time period seen in Figure 2.1. The additional information offered in Figure 2.2 provides the explanation for this seeming anomaly: The number of participants enrolled per quarter over this period declined more rapidly than the number of sanctions per quarter. Because enrollment totals are used as the denominator in the calculation of sanction rates, the monthly sanction rate increased despite the decline in the number of sanctioned participants per quarter. The rising sanction rate, in other words, is partly a function of the simultaneous decline in new entrants and/or increase in de-registrations. At the same time, the number of sanctioned participants also continued to decline while the net increase in the

number of participants fell to almost zero. This dynamic explains the recent fall in the sanction rate shown in Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.2 also shows that the number of compliant and noncompliant participants per quarter each declined between the first quarter of 2004 and the last quarter of 2005. One exception is the number of compliant participants that started to increase in 2005 while the number of noncompliant participants kept declining. Consequently, the noncompliance rate decreased during 2005, as illustrated in Figure 2.1.



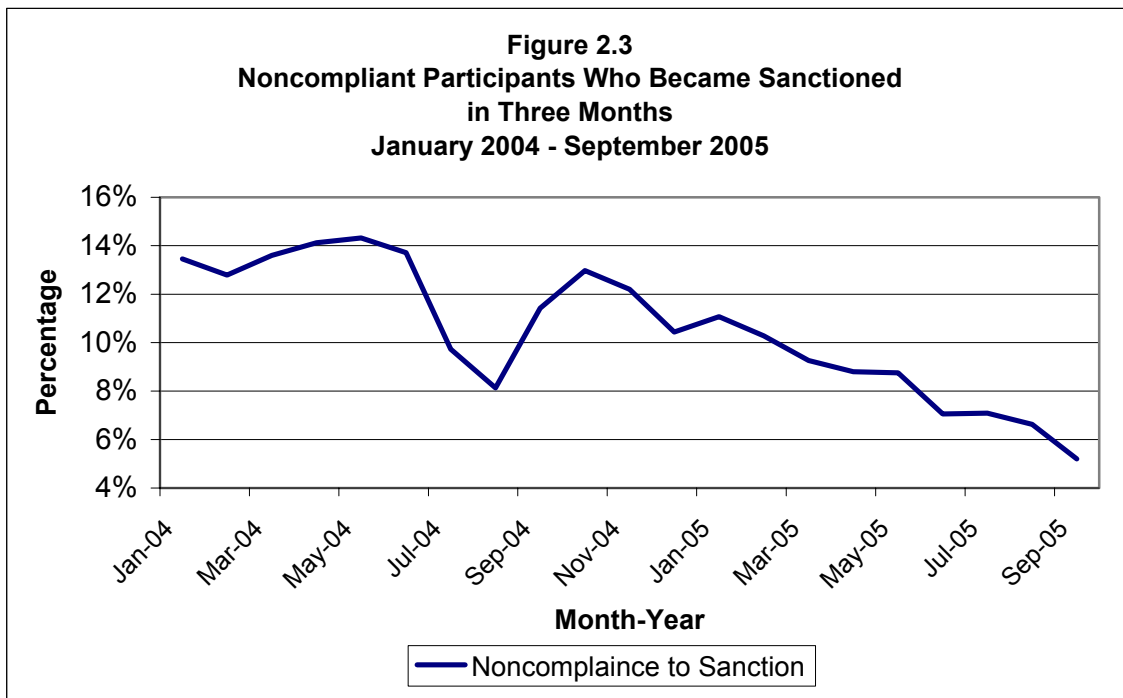
Source: GEARS January 2004-December 2005.

Figure 2.3 shows the likelihood of becoming sanctioned after becoming noncompliant during 2004 and 2005. This probability was derived by observing monthly cohorts of noncompliant participants and tracking them to see if they became sanctioned within three months.<sup>5</sup>

The trend represented in Figure 2.3 shows that noncompliant participants became increasingly less likely to become sanctioned starting in September 2004. By September 2005, five percent of participants who became noncompliant went on to become sanctioned within three months, down from 13.5 percent in January 2004.

A lower proportion of noncompliant participants therefore became sanctioned over time or, put differently, conversion from noncompliant to sanction status decreased between

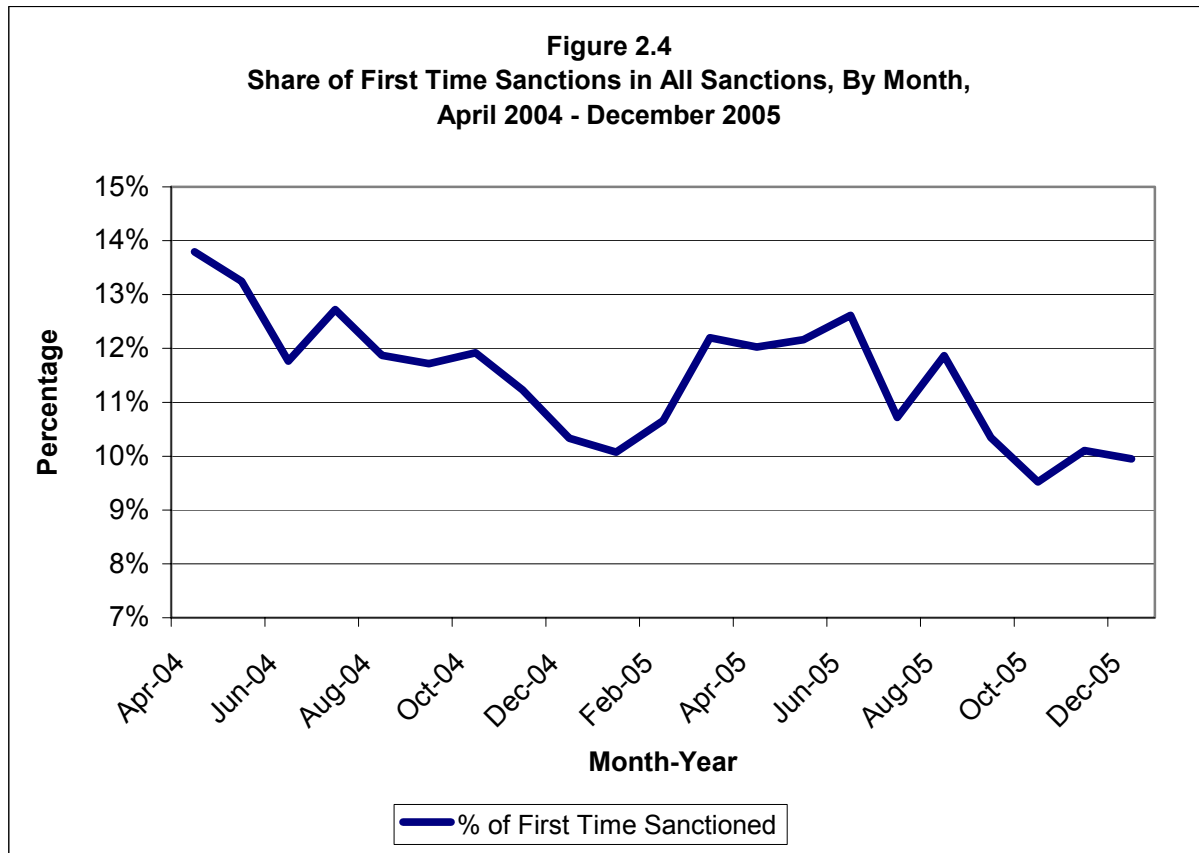
the start of 2004 and the end of 2005. This raises an important question: How is it that rates of noncompliance in the County of Los Angeles, as well as the likelihood of becoming sanctioned after becoming noncompliant, decreased over 2004 and 2005, while the sanction rate increased over the same period?



Source: GEARS January 2004-September 2005.

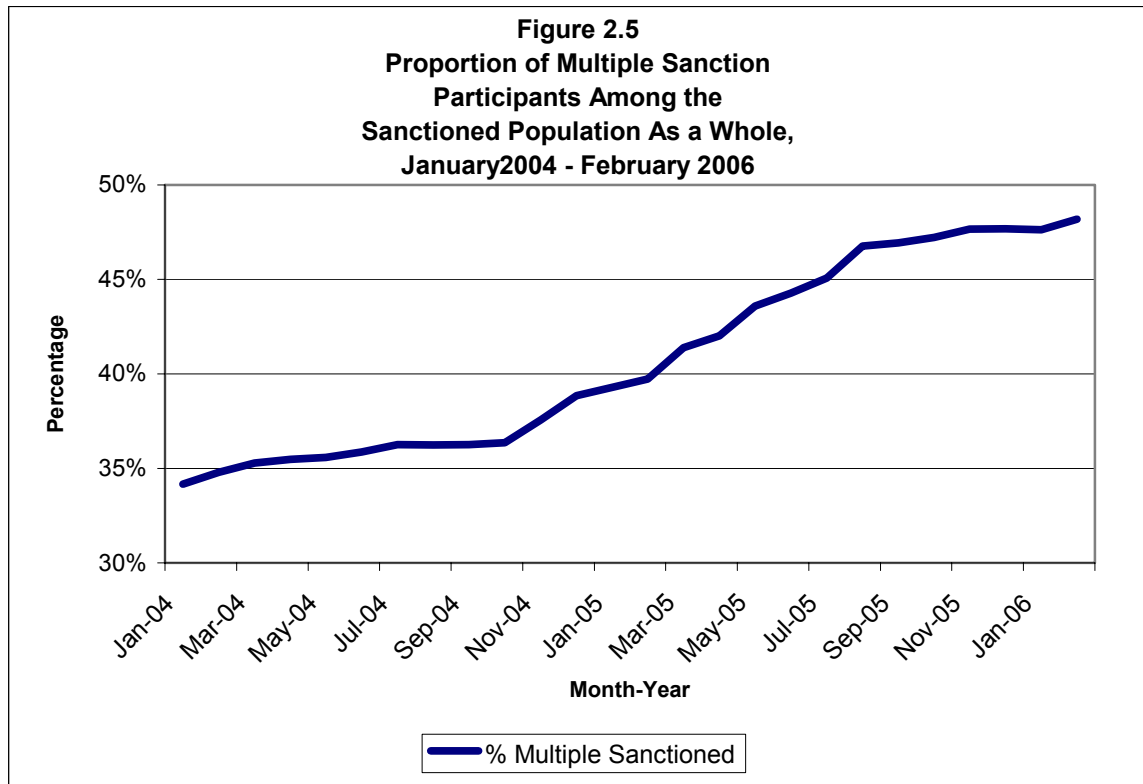
## First-Time Sanctions and Multiple Sanctions

To answer this question, it is first necessary to address a second issue: What proportion of the sanctioned population in each month has consisted of participants entering into sanctioned status for the first time? Figure 2.4 shows the trend in the proportions of participants entering sanctioned status for the first-time for each month between April 2004 and February 2006.<sup>6</sup> The figure shows that the share of GAIN participants in the total sanctioned population that are sanctioned for the first time in any given month dropped from 14 percent to 9 percent over this period. The rising monthly sanction rate over the same period is therefore not a function of an increase in newly sanctioned participants. Figure 2.5 shows the proportion of the sanctioned population in any given month over 2004 and 2005 that was sanctioned more than once and indicates that this proportion grew by 14 percentage points, from 34 percent to 48 percent, over this period.<sup>7</sup>



Source: GEARS April 2004-February 2006.

The larger meaning of the trends represented in Figures 2.4 and 2.5 becomes clear in linking them to the decline in the number of new GAIN entrants over 2004 and 2005 (seen in Figure 2.2). Along with the shrinking number of new GAIN entrants over this period, the rising sanction rate in the County of Los Angeles was driven by an increase in the number and proportion of GAIN participants who were sanctioned multiple times, as well as by the longer period of time that participants with multiple sanctions remain in sanctioned status. Stated differently and more simply, the rise in the sanction rate was largely caused by a growth in the number and proportion of chronically sanctioned GAIN participants.



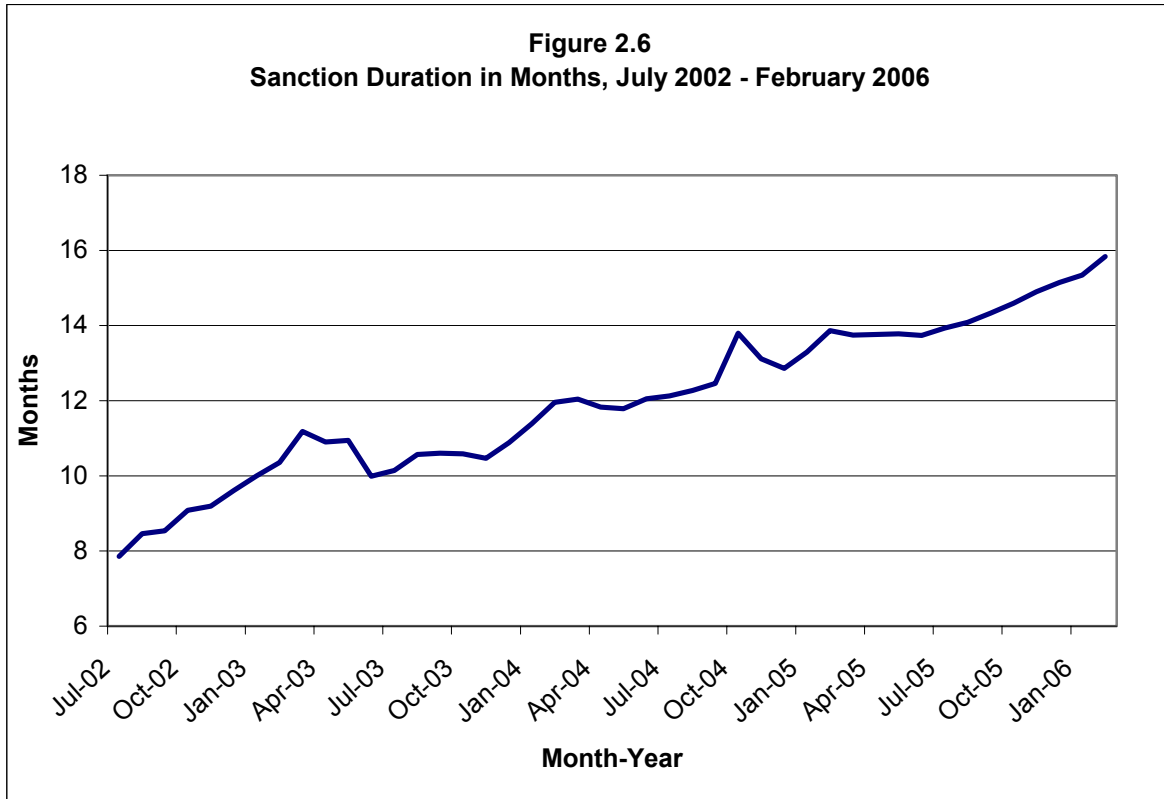
Source: GEARS January 2004 to February 2006.

## Participants Sanctioned for Relatively Long Periods of Time

Within the present context, it is additionally necessary to consider the length of time for which GAIN participants remain sanctioned. Figure 2.6 shows the average sanction duration in a given month from mid 2002 to the beginning of 2006.<sup>8</sup>

Figure 2.6 pushes the start of the study period back to July 2002 in order to show the steep increase in sanction durations that took place between July 2002 and January 2003. Average sanction durations subsequently declined during mid-2003, but then increased fairly steadily through 2005 and into the beginning of 2006. The average number of months participants were sanctioned in any given month between the beginning of 2004 and the beginning of 2006 grew from 11 months to 16 months, indicating that sanctioned GAIN participants have been remaining in sanctioned status for increasing periods of time. Figure 2.7 deepens the analysis of sanction durations by looking at the percentage in any given month of sanctioned participants who were long-term sanction participants (i.e. participants in sanctioned status for six months or more) between late 2003 and early 2006.

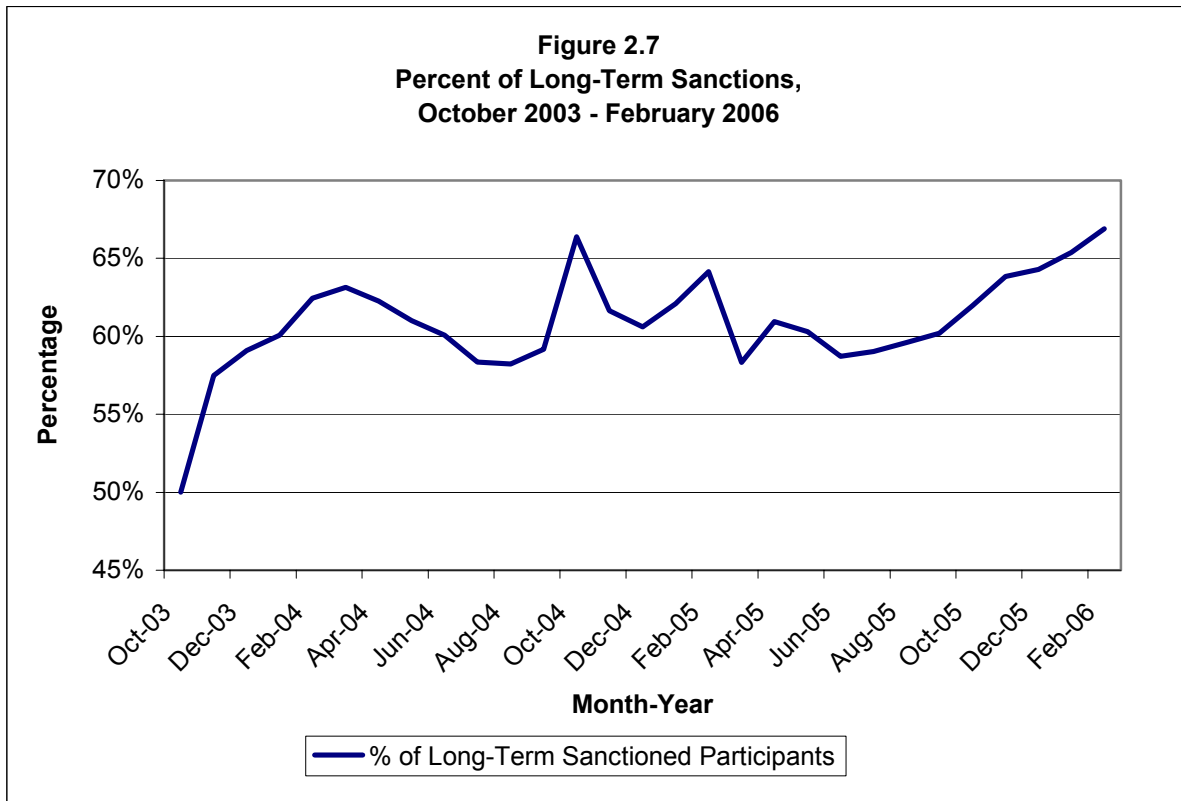




Source: GEARS July 2002-February 2006.

Figure 2.7 pushes the study period back to October 2003 because this was the last point at which the proportions of long-term and short-term sanction participants (i.e. participants in sanction status for six months or more, on the one hand, versus participants in sanction status for less than six months on the other) were equal at 50 percent each. While Figure 2.7 indicates that there have been fluctuations in respective proportions within the study period, the percentage of sanctioned participants who have been in long-term sanctions increased from 50 percent to 66 percent between October 2003 and February 2006.

Long-term sanction participants have therefore generally represented a growing share of the County's sanctioned GAIN population over the study period examined for this report. While the monthly proportions of participants in long- and short-term sanctions have been erratic, there is an upward trend in long-term sanctions, and the number of participants in long-term sanctions more than doubled that of participants in short-term sanctions by February 2006.



Source: GEARS October 2003-February 2006.

It should be noted that almost half (47 percent) of the participants who were in long-term sanctions by December 2005 were participants who entered welfare before the Welfare-to-Work Act went into effect at the State level in 1998. Initial entry for these pre-reform participants occurred before 1998. However, these participants may have cycled in and out of welfare reform between 1998 and 2005. However, this proportion of pre-reform participants in long-term sanctions has been decreasing as this group leaves welfare. The proportion was down from 56 percent in October 2003. At the same time, the share of pre-reform participants in short-term sanctions dropped by half, from 36 percent to 18 percent, between October 2003 and December 2005. More than one-third (38 percent) of all sanctioned participants (both long-term and short-term) were participants who entered welfare prior to welfare reform. Assuming the sanction rates of post-reform participants remain fairly constant, the overall sanction rate in the County can be expected to drop from roughly 30 percent to roughly 20 percent as these post-reform participants leave welfare in the future.

## **The Growing Prominence of Chronically Sanctioned GAIN Participants**

The trends discussed thus far suggest that DPSS has taken positive steps in dealing with the problem of noncompliance and preventing sanctions. Over 2004 and 2005, the rate of noncompliance in the County of Los Angeles decreased. Moreover, though it was somewhat erratic, the likelihood of becoming sanctioned after first becoming noncompliant generally declined. At the same time, however, the County's sanction rate increased through the summer of 2005 before dropping slightly and stabilizing at roughly 30 percent, up from 24 percent at the end of the study period for Part I of the sanctions study (February 2004). The actual number of sanctioned participants declined over 2004 and 2005, but the decline was considerably smaller than the decline in the number of participants enrolled, which explains, at least in mathematical terms, the rise in the sanction rate over the same period.

It is necessary to emphasize here that the rate of participants experiencing a sanction for the first time declined over 2004 and 2005. First-time sanctions are therefore not a factor driving the increasing sanction rate. But the number and proportion of participants sanctioned multiple times, as well as the number and proportion of participants remaining sanctioned for six months or more, has increased. In addition, the average duration of sanctions increased over 2004 and 2005. These findings lead to the conclusion that the rise in the sanction rate is largely the result of the growing prominence within the sanctioned population of chronically sanctioned participants, or participants sanctioned multiple times and/or sanctioned for six months or more.

## **The Chronically Sanctioned Welfare-to-Work Population Is Demographically Similar to Other Types of GAIN Participants**

Table 2.1 offers demographic comparisons between chronically sanctioned participants, never sanctioned participants and participants sanctioned once and for relatively short periods of time.<sup>9</sup> While the proportions shown indicate a few categories in which the three types of participants differ somewhat, the table generally indicates that there is not a great deal of demographic difference, or difference in terms of background characteristics between the groups of participants represented.

The most noteworthy differences between the three groups of GAIN participants compared in Table 2.1 are in the areas of CalWORKs household size, minimum age of children, and ethnicity. A CalWORKs household includes all aided and unaided members of a family living in the same address. Somewhat larger proportions of chronically sanctioned participants live in households with large numbers of people (four or more): While almost half (49.1 percent) of the chronically sanctioned population lived in households with four or more people, roughly 42 percent of the participants in the short-term and the never-sanctioned groups lived in households of this size.<sup>10</sup> However, a further comparison of differences among the three groups within the other listed household sizes (2 and 3) did not reveal any significant patterns. Similarly, chronically sanctioned participants appear to have more children in the 3-5 minimum

age group, but the differences in the other listed minimum child age groups are not noteworthy. Finally, the proportion of both chronically sanctioned and short-term sanction participants is higher among African Americans and Hispanics.

Table 2.1 additionally provides the proportional break down, by sanction status, for participants served by DPSS offices and participants served by contract offices <sup>11</sup> The data indicates that considerably larger proportions of participants in the chronically sanctioned (83 percent) and short-term sanction (80 percent) groups were served by DPSS offices as compared with participants in the never-sanctioned group (70 percent). A more detailed breakdown of sanctioned and never sanctioned participants by GAIN regions is provided in Table 2.2. The most significant difference is observed at the GAIN region contracted to Maximus where the proportion of sanctioned participants was much lower relative to all other GAIN regions.

**Table 2.1. Demographic and Background Characteristics of CalWORKs Participants by Sanction Status in the County of Los Angeles**

	Sanction Status		
	Chronic* (%)	Short-term** (%)	Never (%)
<b>Household Size</b>			
2	23.1	28.5	30.1
3	27.8	29.8	27.6
4+	49.1	41.7	42.3
<b>Minimum Age of Children</b>			
0-2	39.1	42.3	44.2
3-5	25.0	21.6	19.6
6+	35.9	36.0	36.2
<b>Number of Children</b>			
1	35.5	44.5	46.1
2	32.6	31.8	31.2
3+	31.9	23.7	22.7
<b>Number of Adults</b>			
1	52.9	53.6	50.3
2	40.4	40.2	41.7
3+	6.7	6.2	8.0
<b>Age***</b>			
18-24	29.2	33.2	27.1
25-34	37.0	33.1	29.3
35-44	24.6	23.2	26.6
45+	9.2	10.5	16.9
<b>Ethnicity</b>			
African American	26.1	27.9	20.8
Asian	4.9	4.2	6.4
Latino	53.8	50.1	45.6
White	13.0	14.9	24.3
Other	2.2	2.9	2.9
<b>Marital Status</b>			
Married	23.0	22.8	31.6
Unmarried	77.0	77.3	68.4
<b>GAIN Region</b>			
DPSS	82.9	79.5	70.0
Contracted	17.1	20.5	30.0

Source: DPSS; LEADER files, January 2003 to December 2004.

\* "Chronic" refers to participants who have either long term or multiple short-term sanctions.

\*\* "Short-term" refers to a participant who is sanctioned for less than six months.

\*\*\*Participant age was calculated as of January 1, 2005.

**Table 2.2. DPSS and Contracted Regions by Participants' Sanction Status in the County of Los Angeles**

GAIN Region***	Sanction Status		
	Chronic* (%)	Short-term** (%)	Never (%)
<b>DPSS</b>	<b>19.0</b>	<b>18.3</b>	<b>62.8</b>
West County	17.7	19.0	63.4
San Gabriel Valley	17.0	17.5	65.5
Central County	20.9	17.8	61.4
South County	19.3	19.5	61.2
Southeast County	19.7	17.7	62.6
<b>Contract Areas</b>	<b>12.1</b>	<b>14.6</b>	<b>73.4</b>
West San Fernando Valley ACS	16.5	18.0	65.5
Maximus	5.8	9.7	84.5

Source: DPSS; LEADER files, January 2003 to December 2004.

\* "Chronic" refers to participants who have either long term or multiple short-term sanctions.

\*\* "Short-term" refers to a participant who is sanctioned for less than six months.

\*\*\*Contracted Regions exclude RITE since almost all participants served by RITE belonged to the never-sanctioned group.

## Conclusion

Between January 2004 and February 2006, the monthly sanction rate in the County of Los Angeles increased by about five percentage points, from just below 25 percent to just below 30 percent. However, the number of sanctioned participants declined over the same period, and noncompliant participants became increasingly less likely to become sanctioned starting in September 2004. By September 2005 only five percent of noncompliant GAIN participants went on to become sanctioned, down from 13.5 percent in January 2004.

The main analytical challenge guiding this chapter, therefore, has been to account for why the sanction rate has increased while both the number of sanctions and the likelihood of becoming sanctioned after becoming noncompliant have decreased. Part of the explanation lies in the fact that quarterly enrollment in GAIN has declined more rapidly than the quarterly decline in sanctions. In order to provide the rest of the explanation, it was necessary to look more carefully at recent trends *within* the sanctioned population.

The share of GAIN participants in the total sanctioned population that were sanctioned for the first time dropped from 14 percent to 9 percent between April 2004 and February 2006. The rising sanction rate over this period, therefore, was not a function of an increase in newly sanctioned participants. At the same time, the monthly share of multiple-sanction participants in the total sanctioned population over 2004 and 2005 grew by 14 percentage points, from 34 percent to 48 percent. In keeping with this, the overall number of GAIN participants with multiple sanctions grew by almost a third between the start of 2004 and the end of 2005. Moreover, the average number of

months participants were sanctioned in any given month between the beginning of 2004 and the beginning of 2006 grew from 11 months to 16 months, and the percentage of sanctioned participants in long-term sanctions (i.e. six months or more) increased from 50 to 66 percent between October 2003 and February 2006. Therefore, in addition to the declining number of new GAIN entrants, the increasing sanction rate was an effect of the growing prominence within the sanctioned population of what this chapter has referred to as 'chronically sanctioned' GAIN participants—namely, participants who are sanctioned multiple times and/or are sanctioned for relatively long periods of time.

Having established the growing proportion of chronically sanctioned participants within the sanctioned GAIN population and identified this growth as the central explanatory factor behind the County's increasing sanction rate, the next step in this chapter was to compare the demographic characteristics of chronically sanctioned participants with participants who were never sanctioned and participants who experienced only short-term sanctions. The objective in making these comparisons was to obtain a distinct profile of the County's chronically sanctioned population. This profile, in turn, could be used as a means by which to gain a better understanding of characteristics associated with multiple and long-term sanctions.

However, with the exception of some minor differences in the areas of household size, ethnicity and maximum number of children, the demographic and background comparisons between chronically sanctioned participants, never sanctioned participants, and participants sanctioned only for relatively short periods of time revealed no noteworthy differences. In order to uncover the causes of chronic sanctions, then, it is necessary to take a closer look at the barriers to compliance faced by chronically sanctioned participants. The next chapter examines this issue using administrative records and survey data, as well as a combination of descriptive and multivariate methods.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **Chronically Sanctioned GAIN Participants and Barriers to Compliance**

#### **To What Extent Are Chronic Sanctions the Result of Participant Choice?**

One of DPSS' policy goals for the immediate future, as represented through the ongoing efforts of the sanctions workgroup discussed in Chapter 1, is to implement measures designed to lower the sanction rate in the County of Los Angeles. Chapter 2 showed that the County has witnessed a significant proportional increase in the chronically sanctioned portion of the Welfare-to-Work population over the last two years. The effort to lower the overall sanction rate should therefore focus, in large part, on participants who become sanctioned multiple times and/or remain sanctioned. To this end, this chapter looks in greater detail at factors associated with chronic sanctions. In particular, evidence is explored in connection with the question of whether chronic failure to comply with Welfare-to-Work requirements is the result of a rational decision on the part of participants that penalties imposed through sanctions cost less than participating in GAIN. Against this hypothesis, this chapter looks at whether repeated and/or long-term sanctions tend instead to be an outcome of person-level and program-level barriers that block the capacity participants have to comply with Welfare-to-Work program requirements and leave them with no choice but to become sanctioned.<sup>12</sup>

The data used in this chapter comes from both administrative records and a survey conducted with GAIN participants who were randomly selected from among those who entered CalWORKs after April 2002. As elaborated in Appendix B, survey respondents analyzed in this chapter did not receive any cash aid prior to April 2002. This is in contrast with the previous chapter where monthly sanction series are analyzed for all participants including those who entered welfare prior to the implementation of welfare reform. In keeping with the analytical strategy deployed in Chapter 2, this chapter identifies factors associated with chronic sanctions through a comparative analysis of three types of participants: 1) Chronically sanctioned participants (i.e. participants sanctioned numerous times and/or for six months or more); 2) participants receiving only short-term sanctions (i.e. participants becoming sanctioned only once and for less than six months); and 3) participants who have never been sanctioned.

The comparisons between these three types of participants are made using descriptive statistical methods, chi-squared tests with the significance threshold set at the 10 percent level, and multivariate analysis. For further information on the comparative methodology used in this chapter, please refer to Appendix B.



## **Levels of Participant Awareness: Sanction Status and Sanction Policies**

### **Are Chronically Sanctioned Participants Aware of Their Own Sanction Status?**

The notion that sanctioned Welfare-to-Work participants make a rationally informed choice as to whether or not to become sanctioned is premised on the assumption that they possess the full range of information available to them that would allow them to make a rational choice. Furthermore, rational choice models are grounded in the assumption that all choices regarding actions can be subject to cost/benefit analyses. In terms of possession of information, then, a rational choice interpretation of Welfare-to-Work participants would only be valid if participants tend to be aware of their own sanction status and of the consequences of failing to comply with program requirements. RES gauged the degree of participant awareness in these areas by linking the appropriate participant survey responses collected for this report with administrative records. Sanctioned survey respondents were asked if they knew their cash benefits were reduced, or if they were sanctioned, in the past six months. They were also asked if they knew that their cash assistance was reduced as a result of their failure to meet GAIN program requirements and, furthermore, to identify the program activity with which they failed to comply.

Among respondents who were verified to be sanctioned at the time of their interviews based on the administrative records, those that acknowledged their own sanction status and/or reductions in their cash assistance were grouped into the category participants who are aware of their sanction status. The remaining officially sanctioned participants—those who did not self-report their sanction status—were grouped into the category of participants who are unaware of their sanction status.

Less than 1 in 6 (16 percent) of the participants who were chronically sanctioned at the time of their survey interviews (n=213) were not aware that they were sanctioned or that their cash assistance was reduced. This proportion doubled to 32 percent when participants who were sanctioned earlier but cured within six months prior to their interviews (n=197) were asked the same question. However, one third of chronically sanctioned participants who were aware of their sanction status did not know why they were sanctioned. When those who were unaware of their sanction status are added to those who did not know why they were sanctioned, the result is that 40 percent of the chronically sanctioned survey respondents did not possess the necessary information to make a calculation, and therefore were not in a position to make an informed choice to remain sanctioned (see Appendix A).

### **Are Chronically Sanctioned Participants Aware of Sanction Policies?**

The survey conducted for this study assessed participant knowledge of GAIN program rules by asking respondents to characterize the degree of their awareness of nine of the major rules for which they could have been sanctioned. These compliance rules ranged from requirements regarding Orientation attendance to requirements regarding the

signing of Welfare-to-Work plans. The survey categories measuring the level of awareness of program compliance rules were as follows: 1) Not aware at all; 2) aware to some extent; and 3) aware to a large extent.

As shown in Table 3.1, survey results indicate that only one quarter (26 percent) of chronically sanctioned respondents said they were aware of all nine rules to a large extent. The proportion was slightly higher for never-sanctioned respondents (28 percent), as well as for respondents in the short-term sanction group (31 percent). More than two-thirds of the chronically sanctioned respondents were aware to a large extent of five or more of the listed compliance rules. This proportion rose to almost three quarters (73 percent) when never-sanctioned participants were asked the same question. Only 13 percent of chronically sanctioned respondents and 11 percent of never-sanctioned participants reported that they had no awareness at all of 5 or more compliance rules.

Part I of the sanctions study emphasized participant failure to attend Orientation sessions as the major reason for most noncompliance and sanctions in the County of Los Angeles. However, only 12 percent of the chronically sanctioned participants surveyed for this report, and 10 percent of short-term sanction respondents, reported that they had no awareness of the requirement to attend Orientation. Almost one-third of chronically sanctioned respondents said they had no awareness of the requirement that they sign a Welfare-to-Work plan, and one-quarter of these chronically sanctioned participants indicated that they had no awareness of the 32/35 hour work requirement per week.

Another survey question asked participants if they knew that they could attempt to establish a “good cause” for noncompliance that would prevent them from becoming sanctioned. More than four of out of five (84 percent) of the chronically sanctioned survey respondents said they were aware of the “good cause” process or they were able to establish a good cause for their noncompliance. Answers to a similar question about exemptions indicate that almost one quarter (23 percent) of chronically sanctioned respondents were not aware that there are circumstances that can exempt them from Welfare-to-Work participation rules.

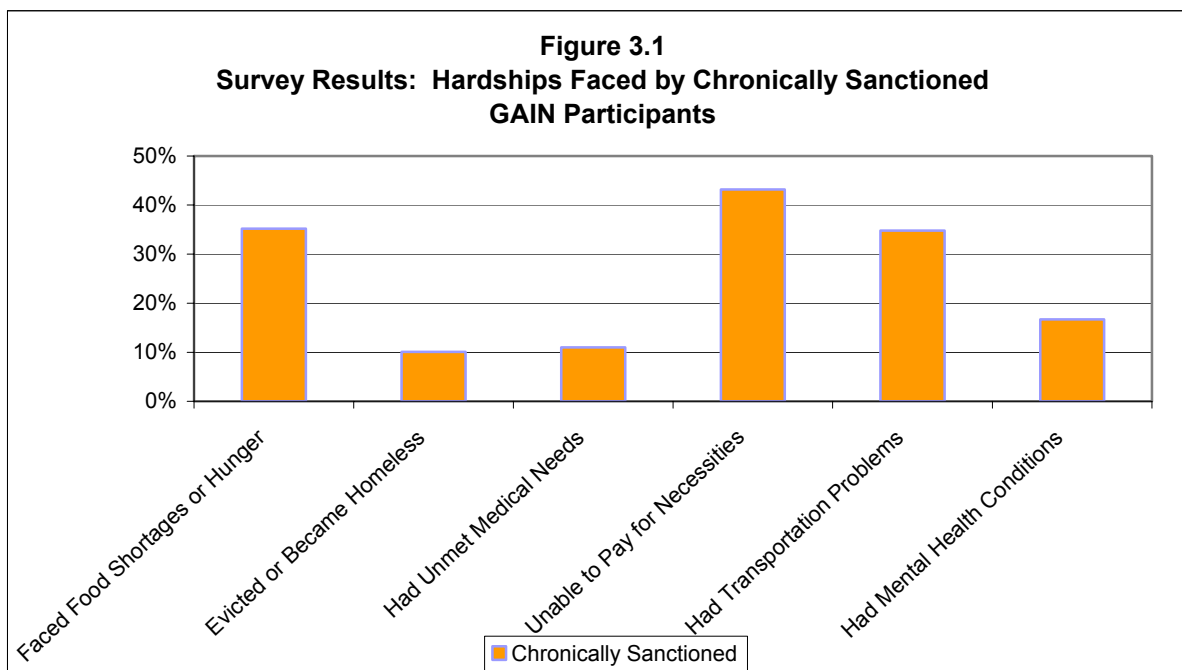
**Table 3.1 Level of Participant Awareness of Sanction Policies**

Category	Sanction Status		
	Chronically Sanctioned	Short-Term Sanctioned	Never Sanctioned
	(Percent)	(Percent)	(Percent)
To a Large Extent Aware of All Nine GAIN Program Rules	26	31	28
To a Large Extent Aware of Five or More GAIN Program Rules	67	76	73
No Awareness At All of Five or More GAIN Rules	13	8	11
No Awareness of the Requirement to Attend Orientation	12	10	13
No Awareness about Signing the Welfare-to-Work Plan	31	22	27
No Awareness of the 32/35 Hour/Week Work Requirement	24	16	18
Aware How “Good Cause” Prevents Sanctions	84	82	NA
No Knowledge About Exemption from Welfare-to-Work Participation Rules	23	20	NA

**Do Participant Hardships Explain Chronic Sanctions?**

The rational choice framework can inform a line of reasoning in which failure to follow Welfare-to-Work rules is interpreted as the result of a calculation on the part of participants that adherence to these rules is more expensive in terms of time and effort than the cash aid they will receive for following program requirements. If these premises are accepted without the benefit of empirical investigation, they might easily lead to the conclusion that sanctioned participants are not truly needy because they can afford to become sanctioned, as is presumably reflected in their rationally informed choice to do so. However, it may also be the case that sanctioned participants, whether they are ‘truly needy’ or not, become sanctioned in the process of pursuing preferences that are more valuable to them than their cash aid, such as caring for their children or attending school or training. The options facing sanctioned participants are seen in

more detail in the remarks some of them have offered in the focus group interviews conducted for this report, which are presented in Chapter 4.



Source: RES Participant Survey, 2005.

The survey conducted for this report asked chronically sanctioned respondents if they had experienced any hardships during the time when their cash benefits were reduced through sanctions. The results generated from answers to this survey question are shown in Figure 3.1. These survey results indicate that more than one-third (35 percent) of the chronically sanctioned respondents faced food shortages, and 43 percent were unable to pay for necessities. Moreover, 35 percent of chronically sanctioned respondents had transportation problems, and 17 percent experienced mental health conditions, which is higher than the proportion of GAIN participants that use mental health services. Even though these figures cannot be compared with similar conditions within the never-sanctioned group of respondents, the results clearly indicate that considerable proportions of chronically sanctioned participants face economic hardships and mental health problems. These results are consistent with other studies that assess the association between sanctioning and hardships among welfare recipients.<sup>13</sup>

Table 3.2 which is based on data collected from administrative records, compares the median incomes of chronically sanctioned, short-term sanction and never-sanctioned participants.

**Table 3.2 Average Monthly Income and Cash Aid Amounts, by Sanction Category and Current Sanction Status**

<b>Sanction Category/ Current Status</b>	<b>Average Monthly Income \$</b>	<b>Average Monthly Cash Aid \$</b>
Chronically Sanctioned		
<i>Currently not Sanctioned/Cured</i>	693	618
<i>Currently Sanctioned</i>	555	483
Short-Term Sanctioned		
<i>Currently not Sanctioned/Cured</i>	663	570
<i>Currently Sanctioned</i>	525	419
Never Sanctioned	655	550

Source: DPSS; LEADER, 2005

The average monthly income of chronically sanctioned participants was \$555 when they were sanctioned and increased by 20 percent, to \$693, when they returned to compliance. The average monthly income of never-sanctioned participants (\$655) was 6 percent lower than the income of chronically sanctioned participants when they were not sanctioned, but this difference is not large enough to assume that chronically sanctioned participants are more equipped to afford the 20 percent cut in their income that comes with a sanction. The income data therefore does not support the premise that chronically sanctioned participants choose to stay sanctioned because they are not truly needy.<sup>14</sup>

### **What Kinds of Barriers to Compliance Do Chronically Sanctioned Participants Face?**

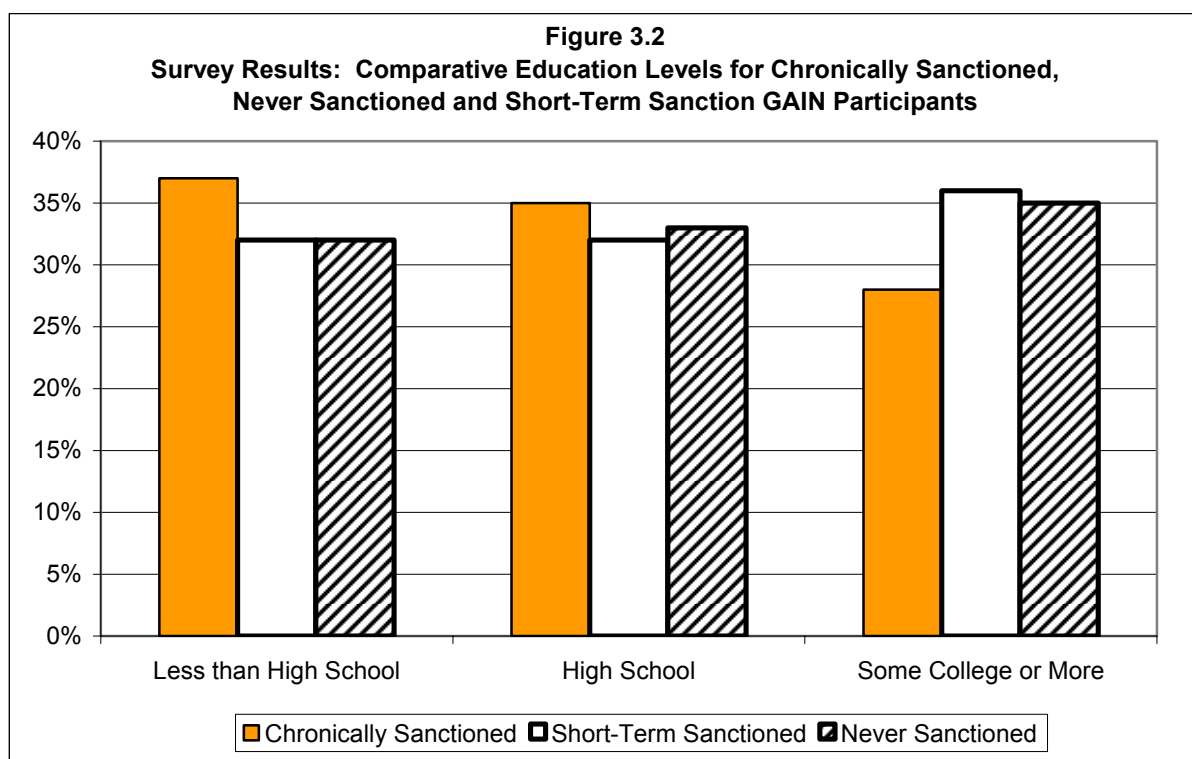
This section explores the extent to which chronically sanctioned GAIN participants face barriers that impede their participation in Welfare-to-Work program requirements. Several studies have suggested that person-level and program-level barriers often interfere with the ability welfare parents have to find employment and comply with Welfare-to-Work requirements. The inability to comply, in turn, often leads to sanctions.<sup>15</sup> Two general types of barriers are explored: 1) *Person-level barriers*, or impediments to program participation that are derived from the personal deficits and family problems of the participants themselves, including limited education, poor work history, personal health issues (i.e. problems connected to substance abuse, mental health, domestic violence and physical disabilities), housing instability (including homelessness), and care giving responsibilities (i.e. when participants are responsible for taking care of an infant or disabled person living in the household). 2) *Program-level barriers*, which are barriers that tend to prevent access to or utilization of resources vital to participation in Welfare-to-Work activities. The program-level barriers examined here are issues related to child care and transportation services, as well as communication between DPSS and program participants (including receipt and understanding of

paperwork and the accessibility of GSWs). Furthermore, special attention is given to the program-level barriers that impede participation in Orientation sessions since the biggest reason participants become sanctioned is failure to attend the Orientation.<sup>16</sup>

## Person-Level Barriers

### Education

It is presumed that a higher percentage of Welfare-to-Work participants with less than a high school education can face barriers to compliance, since they lack the skills to find and retain employment, or to comply with Welfare-to-Work requirements. Since administrative data is limited in providing accurate education information, education results shown in Figure 3.2 are based on survey responses.

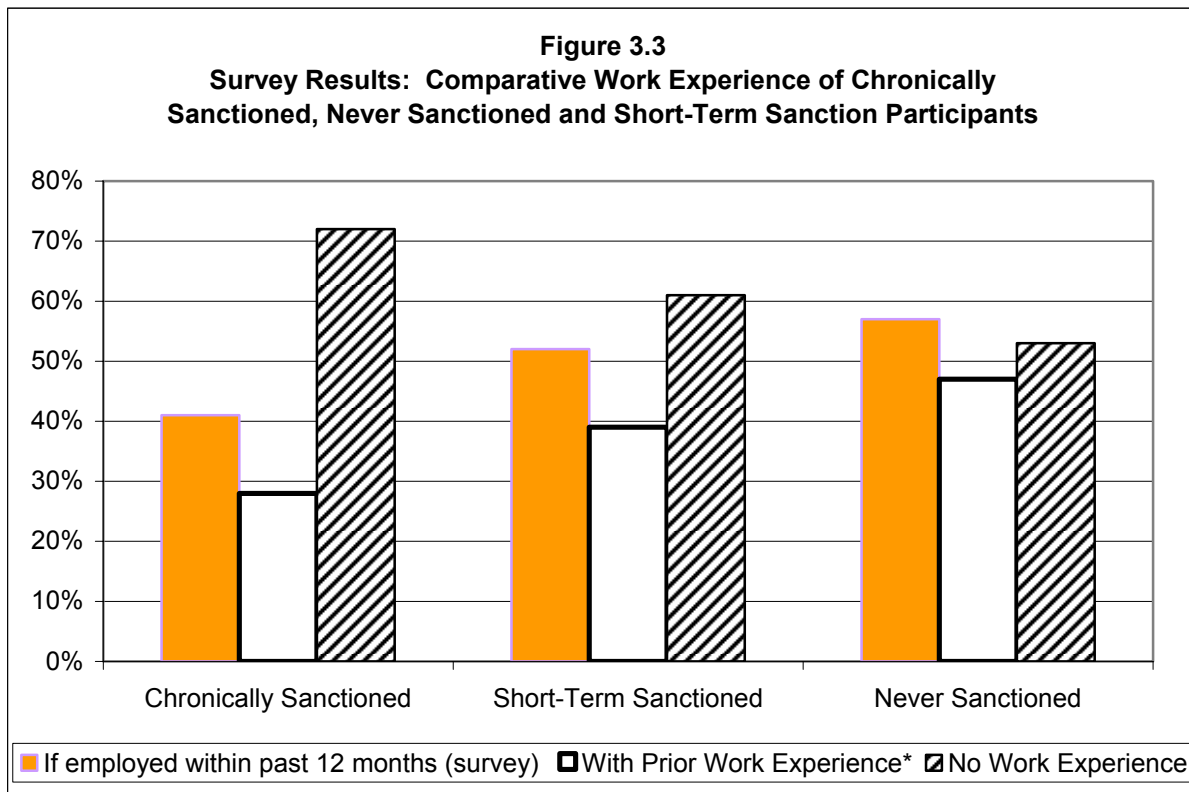


Source: RES Participant Survey, 2005

A higher proportion of chronically sanctioned survey respondents had less than a high school education when compared with respondents who were never sanctioned (37 percent versus 32 percent), and a lower proportion of chronically sanctioned participants than never-sanctioned participants had some college or more (28 percent versus 35 percent). The education levels of short-term sanction respondents closely resemble those of participants who were never sanctioned.<sup>17</sup>

## Employment Experience and Earnings

Lack of recent work experience is a serious impediment to compliance with Welfare-to-Work requirements. Analysis in this area is limited by the lack of availability of State unemployment insurance records at the time of this writing. There is no data to show the pre-GAIN work experience of participants analyzed in this study. Instead, administrative data is used to assess participant work experience before getting sanctioned. In addition, the participant survey conducted for this report asked participants if they were currently employed or employed in the past 12 months. In the analysis, therefore, participants with work experience refer either to those who were employed after entering GAIN but before getting sanctioned for the first time, or to survey respondents that declared that they were employed within the last 12 months. Those participants with no work experience are categorized as participants with employment-related barriers. Figure 3.3 shows work experience findings.



Source: RES Participant Survey, 2005 and DPSS; LEADER

\* Note that prior work experience for sanctioned groups refers to employment prior to the beginning of their first sanction incident. For the never sanctioned group, it refers to any employment while they enroll in GAIN.

Slightly more than two-fifths (41 percent) of the chronically sanctioned survey respondents, as shown in Figure 3.3 reported that they were currently employed or employed in the last 12 months, while the proportion was considerably higher for the never-sanctioned group (57 percent). More than half (52 percent) of the short-term sanction respondents reported that they had work experience within the last 12 months. Moreover, Figure 3.3 indicates that only 28 percent of chronically sanctioned participants had work experience prior to their first sanction. Slightly less than two-fifths (39 percent) of the short-term sanction participants analyzed for this study had work experience prior to their first sanction.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, almost half (47 percent) of the never-sanctioned group had employment while enrolled in GAIN. These findings indicate that there is a substantial work experience difference among the three groups and that chronically sanctioned participants disproportionately have poor work experience.<sup>19</sup>

The participant survey also asked questions about hourly wage rates. Only 12 percent of chronically sanctioned respondents earned \$8 or more per hour in their primary jobs, while less than one-quarter (24 percent) of never-sanctioned respondents and one-fifth of short-term sanction respondents earned an hourly wage of at least \$8 in their primary jobs.<sup>20</sup> Hourly earnings therefore also fail to support the premise that chronically sanctioned participants are better off financially than participants with short-term sanctions or participants who have never been sanctioned.

## ***Personal Health***

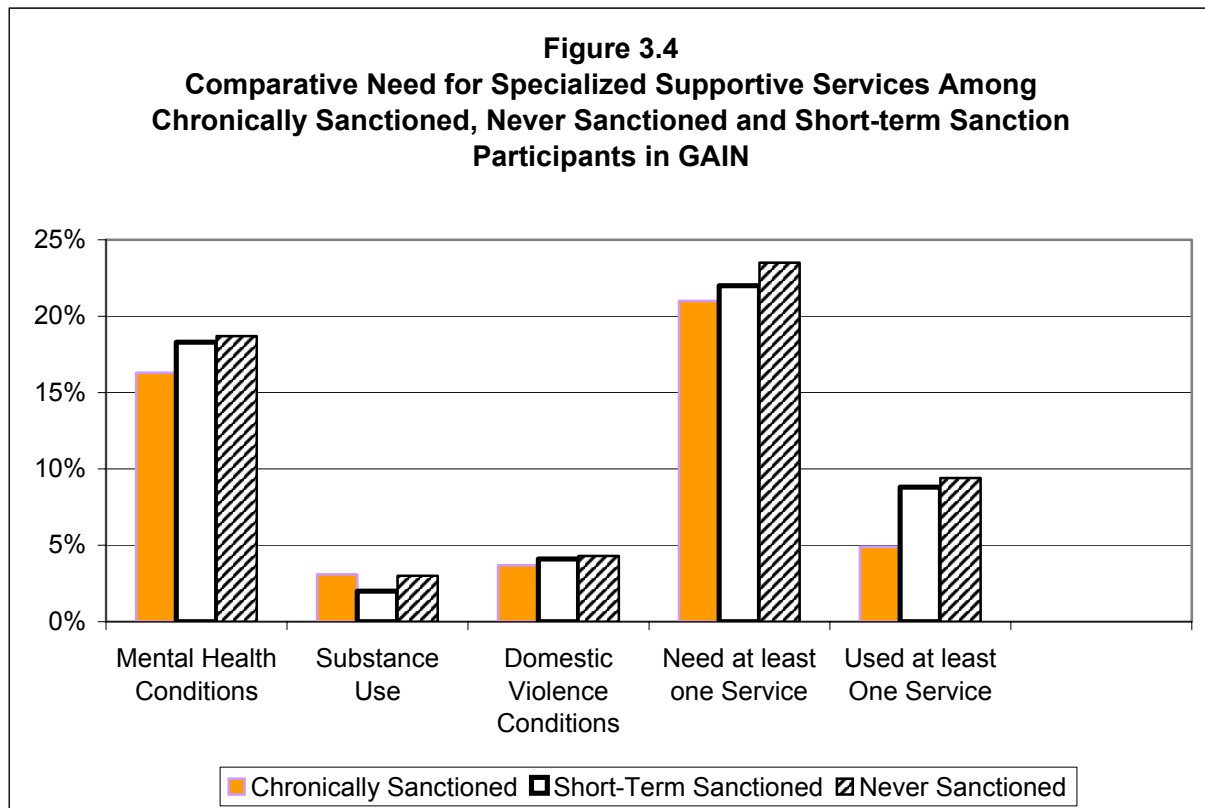
### **a. Specialized Supportive Services**

DPSS offers *specialized supportive services* to participants with problems related to mental health, substance abuse, and domestic violence, all of which are critical barriers to compliance with Welfare-to-Work requirements. In general, studies acknowledge that the proportions of CalWORKs participants who use specialized supportive services are low relative to the expected prevalence rates for these problems.<sup>21</sup> In addition to identifying participants with specialized supportive services needs, the survey conducted for this report sought to identify participants who needed but had not used these services during the six months since their interview dates.<sup>22</sup> The long-term histories of participants were also captured through linkages between survey results and administrative records. In the analysis conducted in this area, participants were considered to have a personal health barrier if they used specialized supportive services in the last two years.

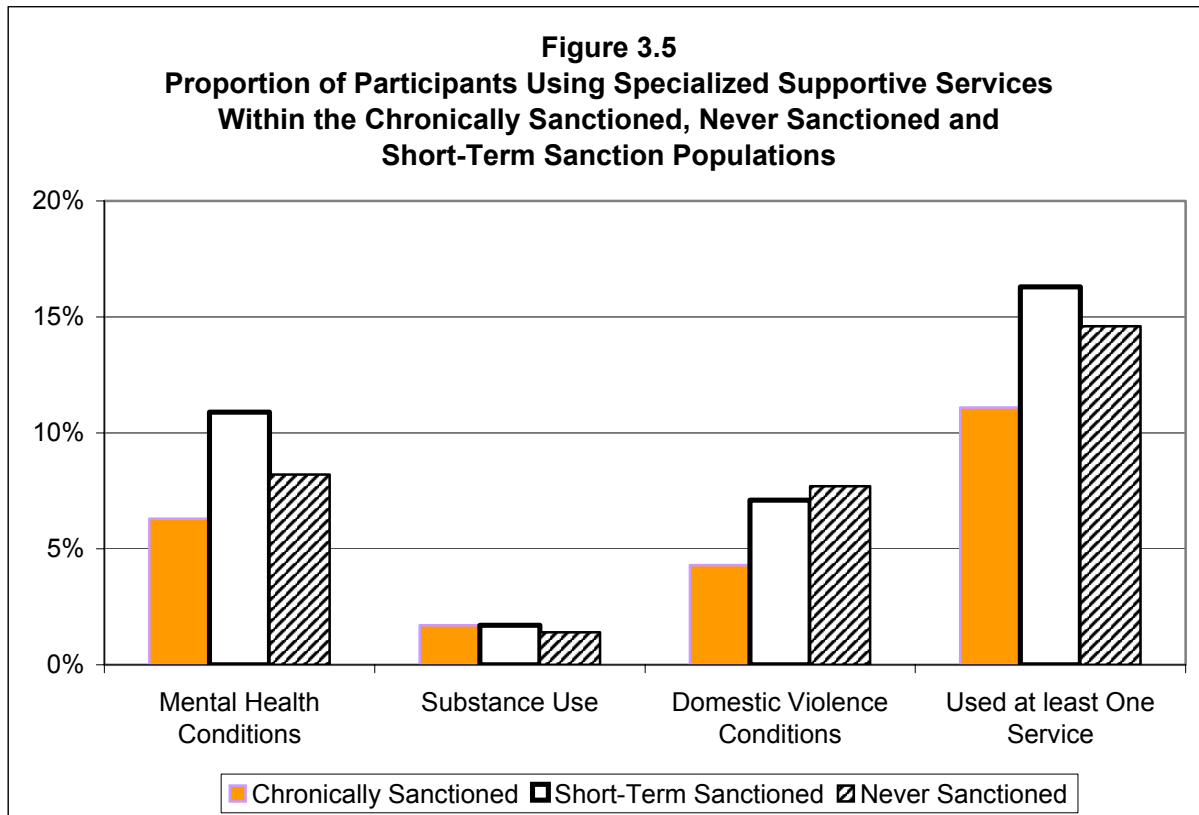
Figure 3.4 is based on survey data and shows the need for specialized supportive services among never sanctioned, short-term sanction and chronically sanctioned participants. Figure 3.5 is based on a linkage of survey data to administrative records and shows the use of specialized supportive services among each of these three groups. Utilization of services was generally significantly lower than the self-declared need for these services by survey respondents—the one exception to this was domestic violence services, where survey respondents appeared to often be hesitant to report



their domestic violence experiences, even anonymously. However, for mental health and substance abuse services, participants declared levels of need that were roughly twice as high as the level of their utilization through DPSS. The need for mental health services was particularly high relative to their use since almost 20 percent of the respondents said that mental health conditions interfered with their work or compliance with Welfare-to-Work requirements.



Source: RES Participant Survey, 2005

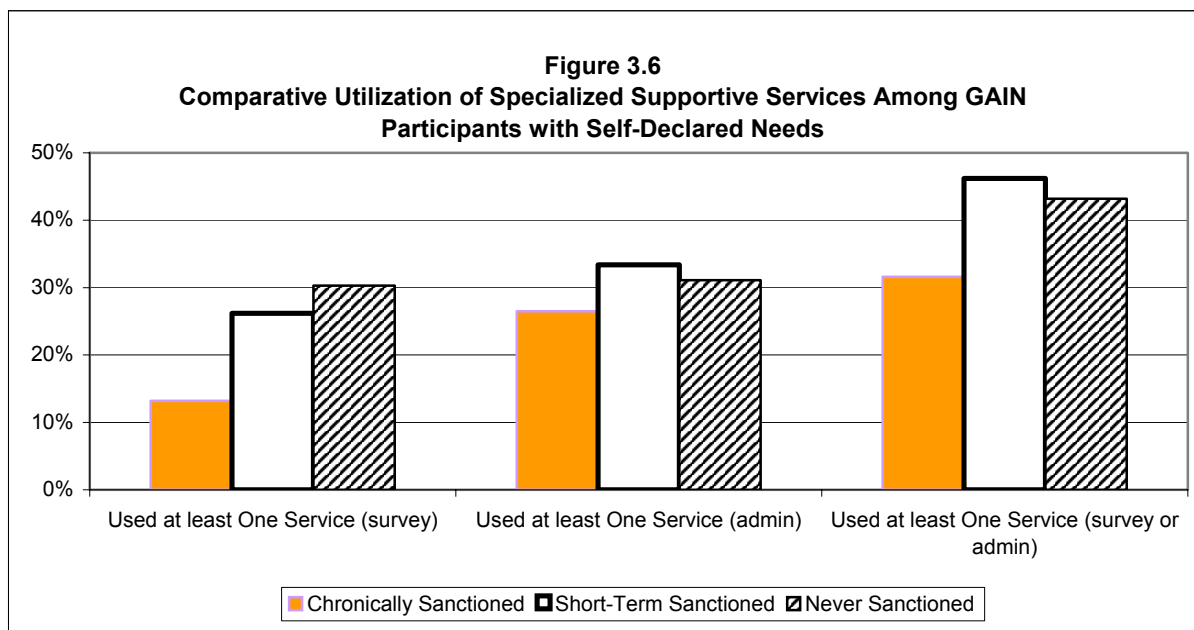


Source: DPSS; GEARS, 2005

The survey points to a slightly higher level of need for specialized supportive services among chronically sanctioned participants.<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, both survey and administrative data show that chronically sanctioned participants used specialized supportive services much less frequently than never-sanctioned participants and short-term sanction participants.<sup>24</sup> Administrative data shows that while 11 percent of chronically sanctioned participants used at least one specialized supportive service, the proportion was over 16 percent for short-term sanction participants and almost 15 percent for never-sanctioned participants. These findings suggest that using specialized supportive services not only helps participants to comply with Welfare-to-Work requirements but also helps resolve sanctions promptly.

These points are further emphasized in Figure 3.6, which shows the utilization of specialized supportive services (at least one service) for participants with self-declared needs for these services in the survey. The data confirms that never-sanctioned and short-term sanction participants who needed at least one specialized supportive service received these service(s) at much higher rates than chronically sanctioned participants. The figure also shows that, while less than one-third (32 percent) of chronically sanctioned participants with needs for specialized supportive services received them, almost half (46 percent) of short-term sanctioned participants received the services they

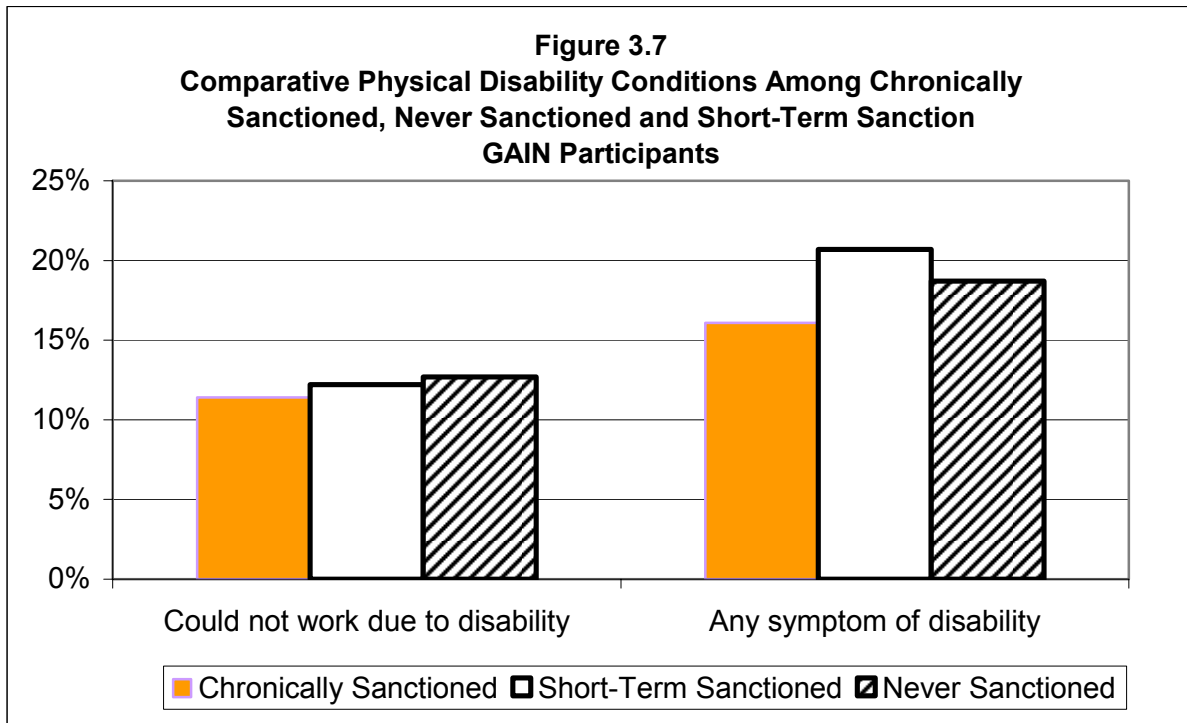
needed. This proportion was also much higher (43 percent) for the never-sanctioned group.



Source: RES Participant Survey, 2005 and DPSS; GEARS, 2005

## b. Physical Disability

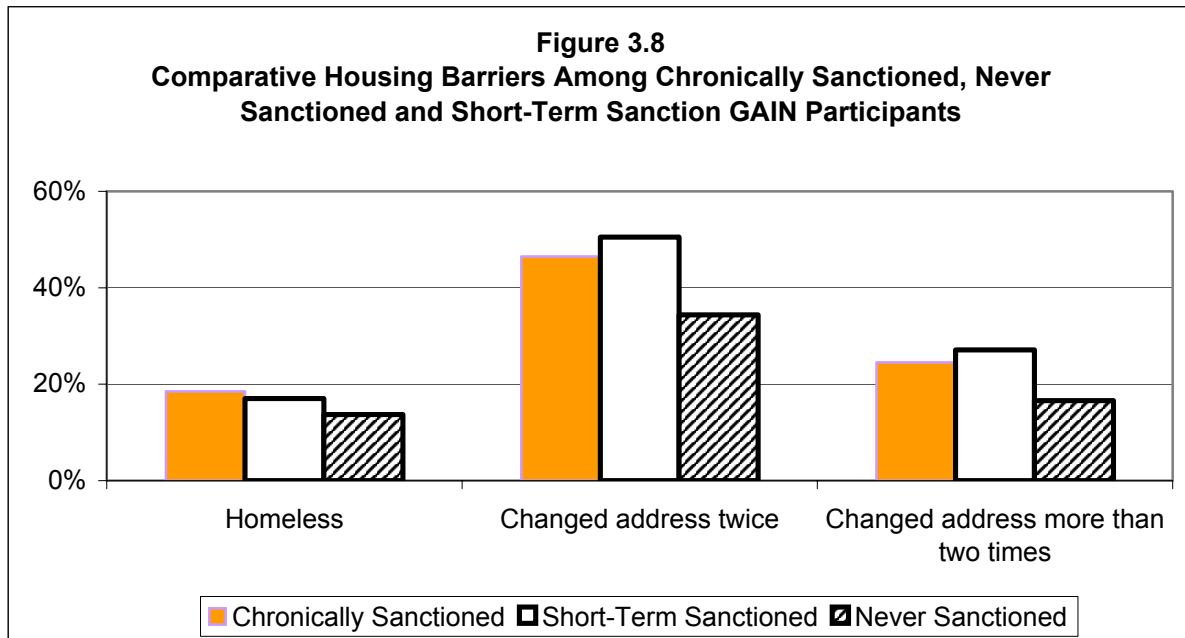
Apart from the need for specialized supportive services, participants may also fail to comply with Welfare-to-Work requirements for reasons related to physical disabilities. These disabilities were captured in the survey conducted for this study by asking participants if the disabilities prevented them from working at some point over the past twelve months. Moreover, disability conditions were identified from administrative data sources. As shown in Figure 3.7, there is no evidence from the data that the physical disability conditions of chronically sanctioned participants are much different from those of never-sanctioned and short-term sanction participants. The proportion of chronically sanctioned participants with physical disabilities (16.1 percent) is actually slightly lower than that of never-sanctioned participants (18.7 percent) and short-term sanctioned participants (20.7 percent), but these differences are not statistically significant.



Source: RES Participant Survey, 2005 and DPSS; GEARS and LEADER, 2005

### ***Housing Instability***

Another important person-level barrier to consider is housing instability. For analytical purposes, participants were counted here as having unstable housing conditions if their survey responses and administrative records indicated that they had been homeless or had changed their address more than twice over the previous two years.<sup>25</sup> Figure 3.8 shows the proportion of participants who were identified as homeless or who changed an address more than once and more than twice over the previous two years.<sup>26</sup>



Source: RES Participant Survey, 2005 and DPSS; LEADER, 2005

Episodes of homelessness and housing instability are generally observed in Figure 3.8 at higher proportions among participants who have been sanctioned.<sup>27</sup> Almost one out of five (18.5 percent) of the observed chronically sanctioned participants was identified as having an episode of homelessness, while less than 14 percent of the observed participants who had never been sanctioned were so identified. Almost half (46.5 percent) of the chronically sanctioned participants moved more than once over the previous two years, and one quarter (24.5 percent) of the chronically sanctioned group moved more than twice over the same period. These proportions were lower for never-sanctioned participants (34.4 percent and 16.6 percent respectively).

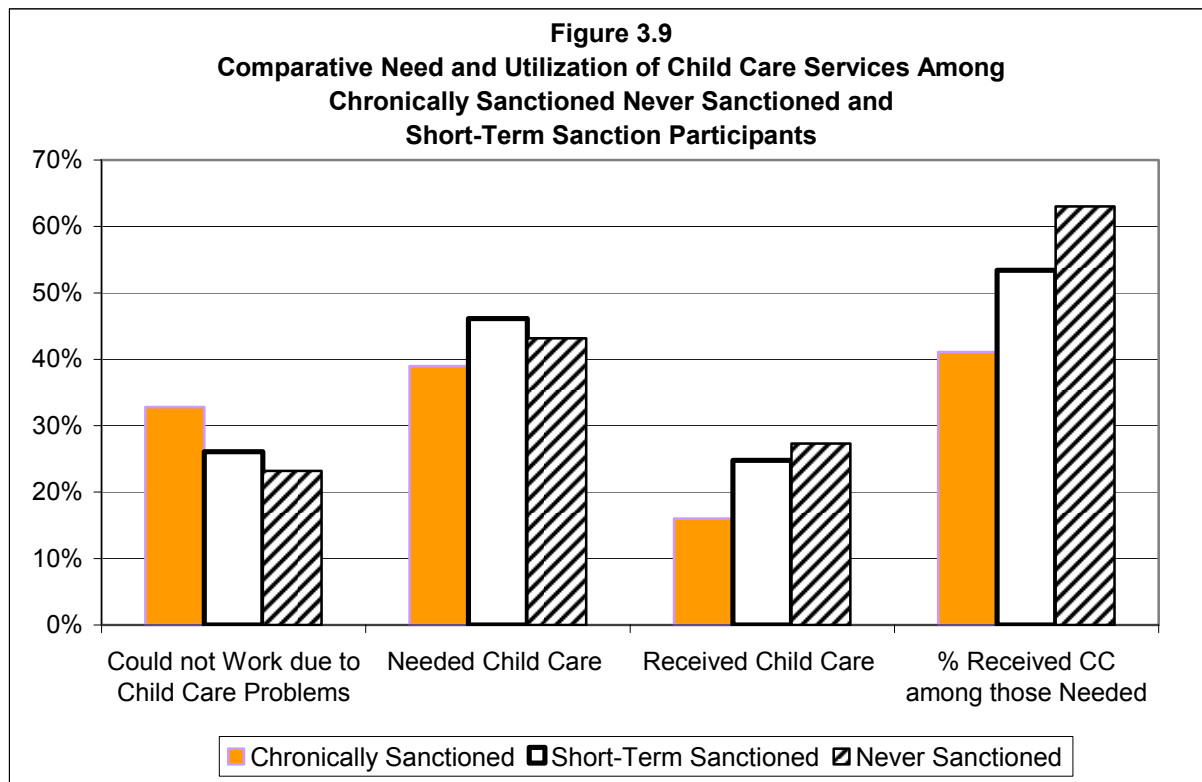
### ***Care Giving Responsibilities***

A final person-level barrier to consider occurs when participants are responsible for taking care of another person in the household, such as an infant or disabled adult. These participants are exempted from GAIN while they are taking care of other persons in their homes. However, as the care giving responsibilities subside, they are required to participate in GAIN activities. The data shows that 40 percent of chronically sanctioned participants had been exempted at least once in the previous two years for reasons other than physical disability—most likely due to a need to take care of another person. However, the numbers are significantly different for other groups. Almost half of the short-term sanctioned participants were exempted, while only 27 percent of the never sanctioned group had an exemption.<sup>28</sup> The data strongly suggests that the conditions that required an exemption for participants also subsequently interfered with their ability to comply with Welfare-to-Work requirements. The dynamic transitions between exempt and sanction statuses of participants deserve further study.

## Program-Level Barriers

### *Child Care: Need and Utilization*

Figure 3.9 shows the proportions of participants who needed and received child care services.<sup>29</sup> These numbers are based on the participant survey, which asked participants if they had needed and received child care assistance in the past six months or if child care problems prevented them from working in the past 12 months. In comparison with never-sanctioned participants, the data clearly shows that higher proportions of chronically sanctioned participants had child care problems (33 percent versus 23 percent).



Source: RES Participant Survey, 2005

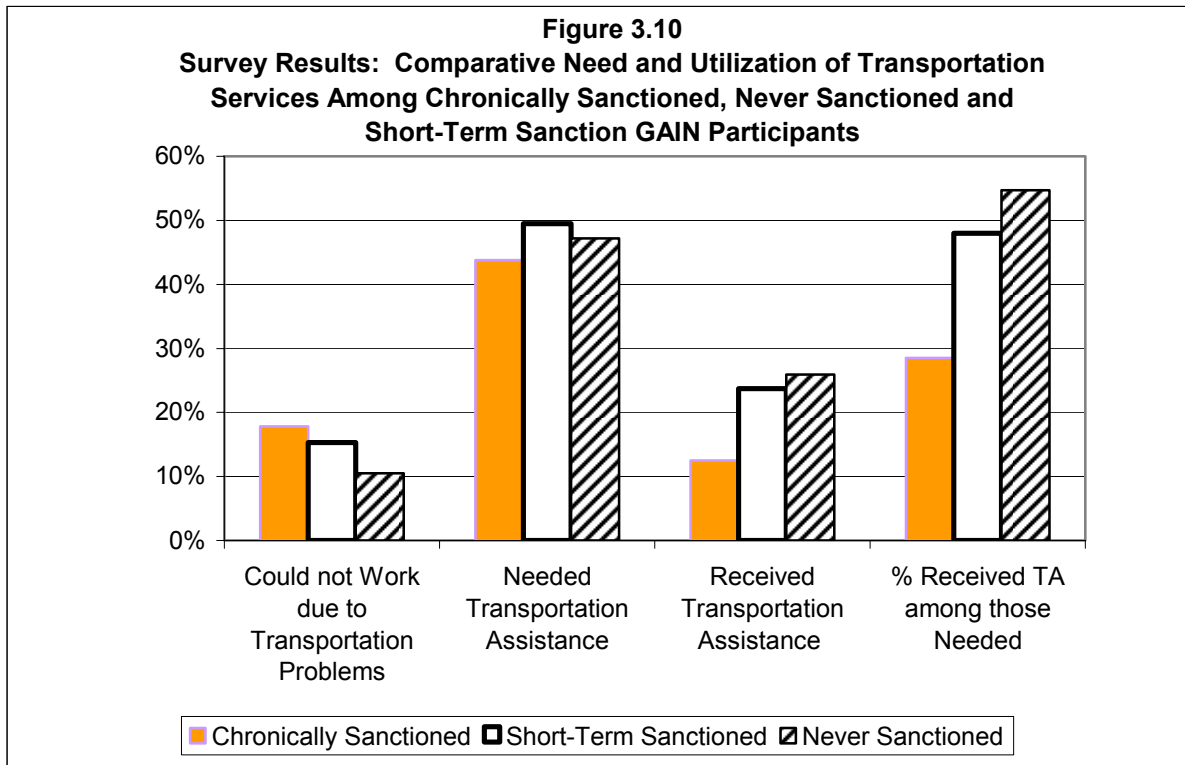
The comparative degrees of need for child care services between chronically sanctioned participants (43 percent) and never-sanctioned respondents (39 percent) are close.<sup>30</sup> Short-term sanction respondents evince the highest level of need for child care assistance. This confirms the importance of child care in first-time sanction incidents as elaborated in Part I of the sanction study.<sup>31</sup>

At the same time, utilization of child care assistance is higher among never-sanctioned participants when compared to chronically sanctioned participants (27 percent versus

16 percent). Moreover, Figure 3.9 shows that only 41 percent of chronically sanctioned survey respondents who needed child care actually received these services. The proportions of participants receiving these services when needed were much higher for short-term sanction participants (53 percent) and never-sanctioned participants (63 percent).<sup>32</sup> The higher levels of child care utilization among short-term sanction and never-sanctioned participants is also seen in comparing the average duration of child care assistance provided in administrative records. During the last three years the average service duration for participants receiving child care was 11.4 months for chronically sanctioned participants versus 18.1 months for never-sanctioned participants.

### ***Transportation: Need and Utilization***

Similar results are seen in looking at findings for transportation assistance, as shown in Figure 3.10. These numbers are based on the participant survey, which asked participants if they had needed and received transportation assistance in the past six months or if transportation problems prevented them from working in the past 12 months. Transportation problems prevented a higher proportion of chronically sanctioned participants from working (18 percent) when compared to never-sanctioned participants (10.5 percent). The need for transportation assistance was similar among chronically sanctioned, short-term sanction and never-sanctioned participants—approximately half of the participants in each group needed transportation services. Utilization of transportation services was quite low for all groups but was much lower for chronically sanctioned participants (12.5 percent) when compared with never-sanctioned participants (26 percent). The gap between the need and use of transportation services is therefore much higher for chronically sanctioned participants. Only 28.5 percent of the chronically sanctioned participants who needed transportation assistance received it.<sup>33</sup> However, almost half of the short-term sanction participants (48 percent) and more than half of the never sanctioned participants (55 percent) received the transportation assistance that they needed.<sup>34</sup>



Source: RES Participant Survey, 2005

### ***Communication Between DPSS and Program Participants***

The participant survey conducted for this study asked several questions in order to assess problems related to communication between DPSS and program participants. Survey responses indicate no real difference between chronically sanctioned, short-term sanction and never sanctioned participants in terms of difficulties contacting GAIN Services Workers. Almost 40 percent of all survey respondents said they had some difficulty in this area, and 60 percent of the participants who answered this question affirmatively said they experience this difficulty either frequently or always.

A related question was asked to sanctioned participants to assess the degree to which they experienced difficulties in contacting their GAIN workers in a timely manner after receiving the Notice of Action from DPSS. A considerably higher proportion of short-term sanction survey respondents (71 percent) said they were able to contact their GSWs in a timely manner when compared with chronically sanctioned respondents (55 percent). Another question, limited to sanctioned respondents, asked them if they tried and successfully contacted their GSWs after becoming sanctioned. Almost two-thirds of chronically sanctioned participants (65 percent) and four-fifths of short-term sanction participants said they tried, but almost 40 percent from each group said they could not reach their GSWs.<sup>35</sup>

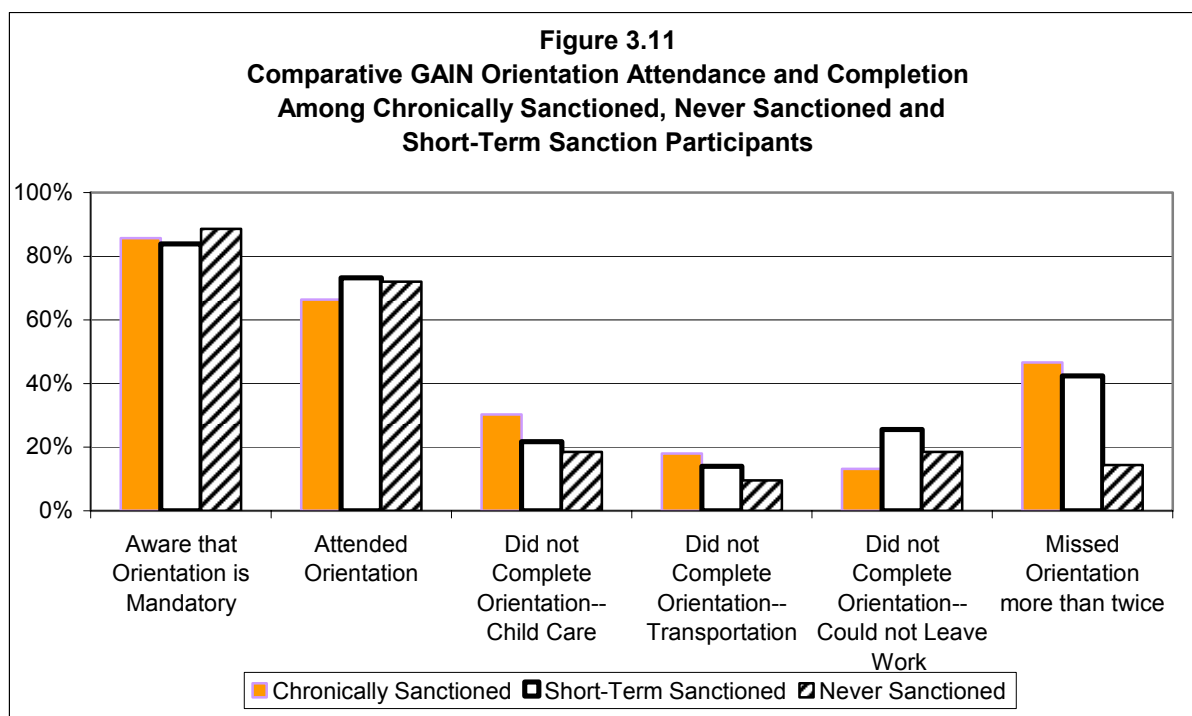


Another communication barrier is the failure to receive and/or understand the official paperwork sent from DPSS to participants after they become non-compliant. Survey responses do not show any significant difference between the three groups in this area. On average, only 8 percent of respondents said that Notices of Action are “never” easy to understand. Close to one-third of the survey respondents said that forms are “sometimes” easy to understand, and the balance said that the forms are easy to understand all the time. Similarly, over 80 percent of the survey respondents said that they receive notices of action in the language they requested. Moreover, only around 15 percent of the survey respondents declared that they never receive notices about their CalWORKs case status or about changes in their GAIN status. Finally, when sanctioned participants were asked about ever receiving a Notice of Action telling them they were not in compliance, merely half of them responded that they received such a notice. Almost all of them who received the form understood that their cash benefits would be reduced unless they contacted their GSW in a timely manner. These findings indicate that participants generally understand the Notices of Action they receive. However, almost half of the sanctioned respondents said that they did not receive a form confirming their non-compliance. This problem needs to be studied further.

### ***Issues Connected to Orientation***

In Part I of the sanctions study, RES showed that a significant majority of GAIN participants who get sanctioned for the first time become non-compliant by failing to attend their Orientation sessions. A more recent RES study confirmed these findings, showing that only one quarter of a January 2005 entry cohort attended Orientation in their first sessions. Moreover, 43 percent of the entry cohort never showed up for an Orientation.<sup>36</sup> Since missing Orientation is a major cause of sanctions, the survey conducted for this report asked several questions that focused on Orientation issues.

Figure 3.11 indicates that the majority of participants observed for this report were aware that attendance at Orientation is mandatory and that failure to do so could lead to a reduction in their cash aid. At the time of their interviews, over 70 percent of never sanctioned and short-term sanctioned respondents, as well as two-thirds of chronically sanctioned respondents, had completed Orientation. However, the administrative data shows that, 40 percent of sanctioned participants versus only 14 percent of never sanctioned participants missed Orientation sessions more than twice in the past.<sup>37</sup> After missing their Orientation session, however, some of these sanctioned participants rescheduled and attended other sessions later.



Source: Participant Survey and GEARS

The participant survey also showed that child care issues, transportation problems, and not being able to leave work were the most common reasons sanctioned respondents failed to complete Orientation sessions. While chronically sanctioned participants had more frequent child care and transportation problems, a quarter of short-term sanction participants missed their Orientations due to an inability to leave work. These findings reemphasize the importance of program-level barriers for chronically sanctioned participants.

## Household Characteristics

This section looks at the relationship between household characteristics and chronic sanctions. CalWORKs households typically include both aided and unaided family members living in the same address. One line of reasoning connected to the rational choice explanation for sanctions is that sanctioned participants have larger families, the members of which provide extra help and financial assistance that makes sanctions more affordable. By extension, these larger families consist of more aided children so that a cut in the adult portion of aid does not debilitate the family as badly. However, analysis presented earlier in this report indicates that, while the average monthly income of chronically sanctioned participants, when they are compliant, is higher than that of never sanctioned participants by 6 percent, this income drops by 20 percent when the chronically sanctioned participants become sanctioned. Available income

data therefore does not by itself support the notion that the sanction penalty is more affordable for chronically sanctioned participants.

Table 3.3 shows household sizes and compositions for chronically sanctioned, short-term sanction and never sanctioned participants. Significant comparative differences between the groups exist. The data given in the table shows household sizes are bigger in chronically sanctioned households relative to never-sanctioned households, particularly in the number of children. Moreover, chronically sanctioned families consist of higher numbers of aided persons. The highest comparative proportion of younger children (ages 0-2) live in short-term sanction households, a finding which suggests that the need for taking care of younger children is a barrier to compliance in the short-run. The data also indicates that a higher percentage of chronically sanctioned participants have pre-school (2-6) and younger school-age children (7-12). Finally, data represented in Table 3.3 shows that there are more chronically sanctioned households where participants are married or living together.

**Table 3.3 Household Characteristics of RES Survey Participants by Sanction Status**

<b>Household Characteristics</b>	<b>Chronically Sanctioned</b>	<b>Short-Term Sanctioned</b>	<b>Never Sanctioned</b>
Average Number of Adults	2.5	2.4	2.2
Average Number of Aided Adults	1.3	1.3	1.2
Families by Number of All Adults			
1 Adult	21%	21%	30%
2 Adults	41%	43%	37%
3 or More Adults	38%	37%	33%
Average Number of Children	2.5	2.2	2.2
Average Number of Aided Children	2.1	1.7	1.9
Families by Number of All Children			
1 Child	26%	36%	36%
2 Children	33%	32%	33%
3 or More Children	40%	31%	31%
Average Household Size	5	4.6	4.4
Households by Number of Persons			
2-3 Persons	24%	31%	35%
4-5 Persons	43%	46%	42%
More than 5 Persons	33%	24%	23%
Households by the Age of Youngest Child			
Age 0-2	38%	45%	38%
Age 3-5	28%	28%	28%
Age 6 or older	34%	27%	34%
Households with Children 0-2 Years Old	38%	45%	38%
Households with Children 3-6 Years Old	67%	74%	51%
Households with Children 7-12 Years Old	48%	32%	37%
Marital Status—Married or Living w/ a Partner	33%	25%	26%
Marital Status—Single	67%	75%	74%

Source: RES Participant Survey, 2005 and DPSS; LEADER, 2005

## Demographics

This section briefly examines the relationship between participant demographic characteristics and chronic sanctions. Demographic characteristics of survey respondents are shown in Table 3.4. The demographic differences among the three groups compared in this study are largely insignificant. There are more male, white, English-speaking and middle-aged participants among chronically sanctioned survey respondents. The never sanctioned group has more female and Hispanic participants, while the short-term sanction participants are generally younger. It should be noted that, since the survey was only sent to English and Spanish speaking participants, the exclusion of Asians and non-English speaking White participants introduced a bias to the ethnic distribution of participants by sanction status. This point is elaborated in Appendix B.

**Table 3.4 Demographic Characteristics of RES Survey Participants by Sanction Status**

Household Characteristics	Chronically Sanctioned	Short-Term Sanctioned	Never Sanctioned
Gender			
Male	20%	17%	14%
Female	80%	83%	86%
Ethnicity			
African American	24%	28%	25%
Hispanic	55%	56%	55%
Other	5%	5%	8%
White	16%	11%	12%
Primary Language			
English	85%	83%	80%
Spanish	15%	17%	20%
Age Group			
18-24	27%	36%	29%
25-34	39%	32%	33%
35-44	24%	20%	25%
45+	10%	12%	13%
Average Age	30	27	30

Source: DPSS; LEADER, 2005

## Noncompliance History

Before moving to more rigorous statistical tests of important explanatory variables, this section looks descriptively at noncompliance history in connection with sanctions. Data collected for this report shows that sanctioned participants experience higher frequencies and durations of non-compliance incidences. The average number of noncompliance incidents is 3.2 for sanctioned participants versus 1.7 for never sanctioned participants. The average noncompliance duration for chronically sanctioned

participants is 330 days, versus 200 days for short-term sanction participants, and a mere 66 days for never sanctioned participants.<sup>38</sup> The average sanction duration for chronically sanctioned and short-term sanction participants are 1 year and 2.5 months respectively.<sup>39</sup> These findings show that sanctioned participants experience considerably more repeated and long term non-compliance incidences than never sanctioned participants. Never sanctioned participants not only experience fewer non-compliance issues but also return to compliance more quickly.

## **Examining the Contributing Factors More Closely**

This section returns to relationships explored earlier in this report to test whether they hold up when they are subjected to more rigorous statistical tests using multivariate models. Two multivariate models are used in the discussions that follow. The first model compares chronically sanctioned participants (N=648) and never sanctioned participants (N=542). The second model compares chronically sanctioned participants with short-term sanction participants (N=294). These models have the advantage of testing for the impact of specific explanatory factors while holding other potentially causal factors constant. The odds ratios of the first and second models are illustrated in the second and fourth columns of Table 3.5.<sup>40</sup> The p-values testing the significance of the estimated coefficients are shown in the third and fifth columns.<sup>41</sup> A more detailed explanation of these models, as well as Table B.3 of the descriptive statistics for the variables, are presented in Appendix B.

The results of these two models, which are shown in Table 3.5, verify the majority of the relationship observed earlier in this report. However, there are some exceptions. Moreover some relationships hold only for one model but not for the other. While statistically significant associations are shown with an asterisk (\*) in Table B.3, all explanatory factors are included in the table in order to show their direction, even if they are not significant.

**Table 3.5 Likelihood of Becoming Chronically Sanctioned**

<b>Explanatory Variables</b>	<b>Odds Ratio Chronic vs. Never Sanctioned Model I</b>	<b><math>P &gt; \chi^2</math> Model I</b>	<b>Odds Ratio Chronic vs. Short-Term Sanctioned Model II</b>	<b><math>P &gt; \chi^2</math> Model II</b>
<b>Person Level Barriers</b>				
Unaware of Compliance Rules	1.25*	.0004	1.29*	<.0001
Limited Education—Less than High School	1.35*	<.0001	1.27*	.001
No Work Experience	1.49*	<.0001	1.37*	<.0001
Earning less than \$8/hr	1.55*	<.0001	1.59*	<.0001
Need Specialized Supportive Services	.97	.60	.93	.42
Use Specialized Supportive Services	.47*	<.0001	.54*	<.0001
Physical Disability	.58*	<.0001	.63*	<.0001
Homelessness	1.07	.38	1.27*	.013
Housing Instability	1.19*	.0025	.84	.15
Exempted other than Disability	.95	.38	.65*	<.0001
<b>Program Level Barriers</b>				
Need Child Care Services	1.47*	<.0001	1.30*	.004
Need but Could not Use Child Care	1.61*	<.0001	1.25*	.03
Need Transportation Services	2.02*	<.0001	1.77*	<.0001
Need but Could not Use Transportation	2.50*	<.0001	1.98*	<.0001
Could not Contact GAIN Worker	1.20*	.0009	1.09	.22
<b>Other Factors</b>				
Number of Aided Persons	1.27*	<.0001	1.05	.18
Household Size (Compared to 4-5 persons)				
2-3 Persons	.89*	<.0001	.88*	.0003
More than 5 Persons	1.32*	<.0001	1.42*	<.0001
Male (Compared to Female)	1.38*	<.0001	1.06	.54
Age Group (Compared to 18-24)				
25-34 Years Old	1.17*	<.0001	1.65*	<.0001
35-44 Years Old	1.06	.11	1.57*	.002
45 Years or Older	.74*	<.0001	1.08*	.04
Ethnicity (Compared to Hispanic)				
African-American	.86*	<.0001	1.03*	.04
Other	1.07	.41	1.10	.50
White	1.90*	<.0001	1.73*	<.0001
Primary Language English (Compared to Spanish)	1.65*	<.0001	1.53*	<.0001
Non-Compliant more than Once	5.96*	<.0001	1.13	.16
DPSS GAIN Regions (Compared to Contracted Regions)	1.28*	.0002	1.52*	<.0001

\* Statistically Significant at 10 percent or less

### ***Awareness of Compliance Rules***

In comparing chronically sanctioned participants with both never sanctioned and short-term sanction participants in terms of awareness of compliance rules, multivariate analysis indicates that the awareness variable is significant for both models in explaining the likelihood of becoming chronically sanctioned. The results revealed that being unaware of compliance rules not only makes a participant 25 percent more likely to be chronically sanctioned, but also 29 percent more likely to stay sanctioned longer or become sanctioned again after getting sanctioned for a first time. In other words, sanctioned participants are more likely to return to compliance quickly if they are knowledgeable about sanction rules and policies.

### ***Education***

Multivariate analysis of educational barriers shows that when chronically sanctioned participants are compared with never sanctioned participants, the lack of a high school degree increases the likelihood of becoming chronically sanctioned by 35 percent.<sup>42</sup> At the same time, the educational barrier is also significant in comparing chronically sanctioned participants with short-term sanction participants, which confirms that the impact of the educational barrier is further intensified once a participant becomes sanctioned.

### ***Employment and Earnings***

The model comparing chronically sanctioned participants with never sanctioned participants shows that chronically sanctioned participants are 49 percent more likely to have no prior work experience. More interestingly, the model comparing chronically sanctioned participants with short-term sanction participants indicates that having no prior work experience makes sanctioned participants 37 percent more likely to be chronically sanctioned once they get sanctioned. In other words, prior work experience not only helps participants remain compliant but also helps them recover from a sanction more quickly.

Moreover, participants earning an hourly wage of less than \$8 are 55 percent more likely to be chronically sanctioned than never sanctioned and are 59 percent more likely to be chronically sanctioned than to be short-term sanction participants. This finding reemphasizes that chronically sanctioned participants usually work at low-paying jobs. These jobs are generally more ephemeral and difficult for participants to retain (which is one of the reasons they become noncompliant).

### ***Specialized Supportive Services***

Contrary to expectations, the need for at least one of the three specialized supportive services (for problems related to either mental health, domestic violence, or substance abuse) does not increase the likelihood of becoming chronically sanctioned. The specialized supportive service variable does not have a significant impact in comparing

chronically sanctioned participants with either never sanctioned or short-term sanction participants. However, the odds of becoming chronically sanctioned are cut in half if a participant receives these services, even in cases where the comparison is limited only to sanctioned participants.<sup>43</sup> Participants who receive specialized supportive services are therefore in a better position to avoid remaining sanctioned for relatively long periods of time and of having repeated non-compliance episodes.

### ***Physical Disability***

Participants with physical disabilities are approximately 40 percent less likely to be chronically sanctioned than they are to be either never sanctioned or short-term sanction participants.<sup>44</sup> This counterintuitive result is possibly the result of physically disabled participants being exempted from Welfare-to-Work requirements for relatively long periods which, in turn, would shield them from becoming sanctioned. Even if physically disabled participants become sanctioned, they may subsequently be exempted from participation requirements and therefore never become sanctioned for long-term periods of time.<sup>45</sup> The results therefore suggest that exemptions are applied correctly for participants with physical disabilities, enabling them to avoid sanctions that might create additional burdens.

### ***Homelessness and Housing Instability***

The multivariate models indicate that homelessness and housing instability are significant predictors for becoming chronically sanctioned. The results show that participants with housing instability issues are 19 percent more likely to become chronically sanctioned than to be never sanctioned. On the other hand, a separate test showed that participants with housing stability problems tend to become sanctioned for short periods of time (i.e. tend to become short-term sanction participants with an odds ratio =1.35). Therefore, sanctioned participants who change addresses often are more likely to return to compliance without becoming chronically sanctioned.

Being homeless is not a significant predictor in comparing chronically sanctioned and never sanctioned participants, but homelessness is significant in comparing chronically sanctioned participants with short-term sanction participants. More specifically, the results indicate that homelessness makes it 27 percent more likely that a GAIN participant will become chronically sanctioned after receiving an initial sanction. However, homelessness is not a significant predictor of short-term sanctions.

### ***Care Giving Issues***

By contrast with descriptive findings presented earlier in this report, chronically sanctioned participants are not significantly more likely than never sanctioned participants to have received prior exemptions due to care giving responsibilities. However, chronically sanctioned participants are 35 percent less likely than short-term sanction participants to have had prior exemptions due to care giving responsibilities (odds ratio=.65). Similar to barriers based on physical disabilities, participants may



become exempted after becoming sanctioned so that they never become sanctioned for a long time.<sup>46</sup>

### ***Child Care***

Chronically sanctioned participants are 47 percent more likely than never sanctioned participants to need child care services. More critically, chronically sanctioned participants are 61 percent more likely than never sanctioned participants to have unmet child care needs. The child care barrier is also significant in comparing chronically sanctioned participants with short-term sanction participants. The risk of becoming chronically sanctioned after an initial sanction increases if child care problems exist.<sup>47</sup>

### ***Transportation***

The multivariate models indicate that transportation barriers have an even stronger influence than child care barriers. Chronically sanctioned participants are twice as likely as never sanctioned participants to need transportation assistance. Chronically sanctioned participants are also 2.5 times more likely than never sanctioned participants to have unmet transportation needs. In addition, the need and lack of access to transportation services are significant in the comparison between chronically sanctioned participants and short-term sanction participants. Once participants become sanctioned, they are 77 percent more likely to become chronically sanctioned if they need transportation assistance and almost twice as likely to stay sanctioned for relatively long periods of time if they fail to receive needed transportation assistance.

### ***Difficulties Contacting the GSWs***

Chronically sanctioned participants are 20 percent more likely than never sanctioned participants to have difficulties reaching their GSWs. However, these difficulties in contacting the GSWs do not contribute to participants becoming chronically sanctioned after they are initially sanctioned. This suggests that these problems are a factor in becoming sanctioned in the short-run, but they do not have an effect once a participant becomes sanctioned.

### ***Demographics—Ethnicity, Age and Language***

In contrast to the earlier discussions in this report, demographic variables such as age and ethnicity turned out to be significant predictors of chronic sanctions.<sup>48</sup> For example, African Americans are, relative to Hispanic participants, 14 percent less likely to become chronically sanctioned than to never become sanctioned (odds ratio=.84). However, the direction of this effect is reversed in comparing chronic sanctions with short-term sanctions, suggesting that Hispanic participants are more likely to be sanctioned in the short run relative to African American participants. In addition, since non-English speaking white participants are not included in the survey (i.e. speaking in Armenian or East European languages), results for white participants are quite different

in terms of their compliance behaviors, revealing that relative to Hispanic participants, white participants are not only 90 percent more likely to be chronically sanctioned but also face difficulties in returning to compliance as shown by the comparison of chronically sanctioned participants and short-term sanction participants (odds ratio=1.73).<sup>49</sup>

The results also show that, in comparison with younger participants (age 18-24), older participants are more inclined to be chronically sanctioned. This is particularly the case once older participants receive an initial sanction. Moreover, the odds of becoming chronically sanctioned are higher for male participants by 38 percent. However, since gender is not significant in comparing chronically sanctioned participants and never sanctioned participants, male participants are more likely to become sanctioned in the short-run but also return to compliance rather than becoming chronically sanctioned. Finally, as expected from the ethnic comparison, chronically sanctioned participants are 64 percent more likely than never sanctioned participants to be English speakers (relative to Spanish speakers). English speaking participants are also more likely to stay sanctioned longer once they become sanctioned.

### ***Household Size and Number of Aided Persons***

Multivariate results show that, each additional aided person in a GAIN household increases the odds of becoming chronically sanctioned by 27 percent. Moreover, participants coming from households with more than 5 persons are 32 percent more likely to become chronically sanctioned.<sup>50</sup> These findings, which are based on the model comparing chronically sanctioned participants and never sanctioned participants, can be interpreted in two different ways:

It may be the case that participants living in larger households receive financial assistance from unaided adults living with them and/or receive larger amounts of cash aid for additional children. Under these circumstances, participants may be better off financially so that they can afford to stay sanctioned for longer periods of time. However, earlier findings based on income data do not support this interpretation.

A second interpretation would suggest that having additional children is a burden on participants and appears to be a barrier to compliance. Results from the model comparing chronically sanctioned participants with short-term sanction participants indicate that, while participants from larger households are more likely to stay sanctioned for longer periods after becoming sanctioned (Odds ratio=1.42), the number of aided persons in the household is not a significant predictor of chronic sanctions when compared to short-term sanctions. Relative to short-term sanction households, chronically sanctioned households do not have significantly higher numbers of aided persons. A separate run also showed that each additional aided person increases the likelihood of becoming a short-term sanctioned participant by 15 percent. These findings support the interpretation that having higher numbers of aided adults in the household increases the odds of becoming sanctioned but not of becoming chronically sanctioned after the initial sanction is imposed. The presence of additional children in households

seems to make it more difficult for participants to comply as opposed to giving them additional funds that make them financially better off.

### **Noncompliance History**

The odds of becoming chronically sanctioned are 6 times higher when participants have previously experienced more than one non-compliance episode. However, after becoming sanctioned, the effect of the number of noncompliance episodes does not significantly affect the probability of becoming chronically sanctioned. Participants with more than one non-compliance episode are more likely to get sanctioned but not more likely to become chronically sanctioned.<sup>51</sup>

### **GAIN Region**

The model comparing chronically sanctioned and never sanctioned participants indicates that chronically sanctioned participants are 28 percent more likely to be registered in regions administered by DPSS than they are to be registered in regions administered by contract organizations.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, the model comparing chronically sanctioned participants with short-term sanction participants shows that once participants become sanctioned, those registered in DPSS regions are 52 percent more likely to stay sanctioned longer or experience multiple sanctions than those registered in contract regions.<sup>53</sup>

### **Conclusion**

A good portion of the analyses presented in this chapter have been guided by the question of whether chronically sanctioned participants choose to be sanctioned. To what extent, in other words, are chronic sanctions the result of participant calculations regarding the cost of compliance versus the cost of noncompliance? It is not possible with the data used in this chapter—including data from the participant survey conducted for this report—to unambiguously confirm the decision making processes informing participant behavior when it comes to compliance with Welfare-to-Work rules. This type of subjective information is more readily available in the next chapter, which is based on micro-level, qualitative data collected in focus group sessions with GAIN participants. However, the quantitative findings offered in this chapter have enabled a number of inferences to be made which, in turn, provide some clues as to the relative importance of participant choice and calculation with respect to sanctions.

Descriptive analysis of survey data revealed that 40 percent of the chronically sanctioned participants observed for this report either did not know if they were sanctioned or did not know why they were sanctioned. Multivariate analysis bolstered this finding, indicating not only that participants are more likely to return to compliance quickly if they are knowledgeable about sanction rules, but also, more fundamentally, that a close predictive relationship exists between unawareness of compliance rules and chronic sanctions. While this evidence presents some ambiguities, it is largely at odds with the rational choice perspective on sanctions because it shows that a

considerable proportion of chronically sanctioned participants do not have the awareness necessary to make an informed calculation regarding their compliance with program rules. Moreover, it is this lack of awareness, as opposed to an informed and rational point of view regarding whether or not to comply with program requirements that seems to explain, at least in part, the ongoing and/or repeated sanction status of chronically sanctioned participants.

In further considering factors other than participant choice that might explain chronic sanctions, this chapter gave careful consideration to the causal weight that might be given to person-level and program-level barriers impeding participation in Welfare-to-Work activities. The findings resulting from the analyses suggest, for the most part, that these barriers provide a stronger and more plausible explanation for chronic sanctions. On the person-level side, chronically sanctioned participants tend to be less educated than either never sanctioned participants or short-term sanction participants, and they have disproportionately poor work experience. Multivariate analysis adds to this picture in interesting ways, showing that sanctioned participants are 37 percent more likely to be chronically sanctioned when they have poor work experience, and participants earning hourly wages of less than \$8, which is often associated with transient, low-skill employment, are considerably more likely to be chronically sanctioned than they are to be either never sanctioned or short-term sanction participants. In addition, significantly higher episodes of homelessness and housing instability were observed among chronically sanctioned participants when compared with never sanctioned and short-term sanction participants. Moreover, multivariate analysis showed that participants with housing instability issues are 19 percent more likely to become chronically sanctioned than they are to be never sanctioned. At the same time, while homelessness was not significant in comparing chronically sanctioned and never sanctioned participants, multivariate results indicated that homelessness makes it 27 percent more likely that a participant will become chronically sanctioned after receiving an initial sanction.

An additional set of person-level barriers—in particular, those that DPSS associates with the need for and utilization of specialized supportive services (i.e., problems related to substance abuse, mental health issues and domestic violence)—have less direct weight in explaining chronic sanctions. Neither descriptive nor multivariate analysis indicated that participants with higher levels of need for these services are more likely to become chronically sanctioned. Put differently, problems related to substance abuse, mental health and/or domestic violence do not, in and of themselves, increase the likelihood that participants will become chronically sanctioned.

At the same time, however, in considering potential policy enhancements, it is important to note that chronically sanctioned participants used specialized supportive services much less frequently than both never sanctioned and short-term sanction participants. Moreover, even when the comparison is limited only to sanctioned participants, multivariate analysis indicates that the odds of becoming chronically sanctioned diminish by half if a participant uses specialized supportive services. These findings suggest that using specialized supportive services not only helps participants comply

but also helps them resolve sanctions quickly. DPSS should therefore be encouraged to continue and perhaps enhance the recent efforts it has made to identify participants who need but do not utilize specialized supportive services.

The examination of program-level barriers revealed some important differences between the groups observed for this report. These differences bolster the argument that chronic sanctions are largely a product of deficits and barriers as opposed to the result of participant preferences and choices. For example, while the comparative degrees of need for child care services were similar between chronically sanctioned and never sanctioned participants, further analysis showed that chronically sanctioned participants were 61 percent more likely to have unmet child care needs than never sanctioned participants. In addition, the risk of becoming chronically sanctioned increases after an initial sanction if child care problems exist. Transportation barriers, moreover, are even more problematic for chronically sanctioned participants. While utilization of transportation assistance is generally low, this is especially the case for those who experience repeated and/or long-term sanctions. Less than 30 percent of chronically sanctioned participants who needed transportation assistance received it, and these participants were 2.5 times more likely to have unmet transportation needs than never-sanctioned participants. Furthermore, once participants become sanctioned they are almost twice as likely to stay sanctioned for relatively long periods of time if they fail to receive needed transportation assistance. Unmet child care and, especially, unmet transportation needs suggest a lack of program knowledge, particularly when interpreted in relation to the high percentage of chronically sanctioned participants who don't know how to cure their sanction or why they are sanctioned.

Issues surrounding the relationship between household size and sanctions add some important depth to the question of how much importance should be given to participant choice in the attempt to understand failure to comply with Welfare-to-Work requirements. By itself, available income data does not lend support to the notion that sanction penalties are more affordable for chronically sanctioned participants. However, results of multivariate analysis in the area of household size leave open the possibility that participants living in larger households receive financial assistance from unaided adults living with them or receive larger amounts of cash aid for additional children in the house, either of which possibility could presumably make chronic failure to comply with program requirements more affordable among participants living in larger households. Results show, for example, that each additional person living in a GAIN household significantly increases the odds of becoming chronically sanctioned. This is particularly the case in households with more than five people. But it is also possible to offer an alternative interpretation which would suggest that additional children in a household pose a barrier to compliance. This becomes especially plausible in considering the outsized problems chronically sanctioned participants have in the area of child care.

On balance, while this chapter's analyses of factors connected to chronic sanctions do not entirely undermine the rational choice perspective on sanctions, a stronger case can be made for the general argument that chronic sanctions tend to afflict especially

vulnerable GAIN participants, regardless of the choices and calculations they might wish to make if they had the capacity to do so. These participants face numerous hardships and barriers, many of which are beyond their immediate control, and as a result they find themselves facing what, more often than not, are grant reductions that make it even more difficult for them to make ends meet.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **Parents Talk About Sanctions and Leaving CalWORKs**

#### **Introduction**

As part of the effort to understand compliance and sanction issues from the viewpoints of GAIN participants in the County of Los Angeles, researchers conducted four focus groups whose members were recruited randomly from a sample of current and previous GAIN participants. In total, 26 parents were interviewed in January 2006. Building on the qualitative and quantitative findings reported in the Sanction Study Part I, researchers established the following criteria for selecting focus group participants: 1) parents with varied sanction histories; 2) within these, English and Spanish speaking participants; and 3) GAIN Regions with participant populations large enough for recruiting needs.<sup>54</sup> Throughout this chapter, focus group members are identified by their varied histories as: 1) currently with multiple or first long-term sanctions; 2) currently in short-term first sanctions; 3) long-term “cured” and in compliance after multiple or first sanctions; or 4) “leavers,” participants who left CalWORKs when they were either in compliance with or sanctioned by GAIN. While indicating significant differences between noncompliance patterns in these four groups, the following report is mainly organized around the personal and program barriers to compliance that parents shared as result of their poverty, needs, and priorities, and the characteristics and requirements of GAIN and CalWORKs. See Appendix C for a description of the focus group methodology, characteristics of the sample, conduct of focus groups, and focus group questions.

This report attempts to provide answers from participants to questions posed by County of Los Angeles officials and administrators: What are the causes of noncompliance and sanctions in GAIN? What could be done to increase compliance and decrease sanctions? Using findings from the focus groups, researchers try to provide some answers from the viewpoints and in the words of participants who have experienced sanctions and, in some cases, have left the program and given up all its aid and services. This report on focus group findings is divided into the following sections:

- 1) Personal Barriers to Compliance, situations where participants’ caretaking, health, work, and other needs take priority over their compliance with GAIN requirements.
- 2) Program Barriers to Compliance, administrative and communication problems that can lead to a lack of participant knowledge, misinformation, negativity, and noncompliance.
- 3) Leaving CalWORKs, why parents leave, and how they are coping without the aid.
- 4) Summary and Conclusions, a summary and analysis of findings.

- 5) Participant Recommendations for encouraging compliance and reducing sanctions.

## **1) Personal Barriers to Compliance**

To understand participants and their experience with GAIN is to recognize that their perspectives may be similar to, but also different from, those who design, manage, and carry out the Welfare-to-Work programs. The goal of caseworkers is to inform parents of their rights and the program requirements, to encourage compliance with regulations, and provide services needed in their transition from welfare to work. In contrast, participants frame their understandings of compliance and sanctions in terms of their poverty situations and most urgent priorities—getting enough money from work, welfare, or somewhere else to pay the rent and utilities, and take care of health, food, and the many needs of their children. From their perspectives, GAIN is an important, but not the only, part of their struggle to make ends meet. Focus groups help us understand how participants' priorities, their perspectives, their "situations," and their struggle to get ahead mesh with the GAIN program and lead to compliance or clash with the program's requirements and lead to noncompliance, sanctions, or leaving GAIN and CalWORKs altogether.

### ***When Work Takes Priority***

After conducting multiple focus groups with parents who had been sanctioned, this research has found a frequent answer to the question of why some parents decide to take or remain sanctioned rather than participate in GAIN: parents who are working feel that GAIN requirements conflict with their ability to hold down a job. Survival and providing for their families is their priority, and they feel that the benefits of working outweigh the benefits of fulfilling GAIN requirements or the cash they lose when they are sanctioned. If they can get by without their portion of the aid rather than deal with the additional burden of fulfilling program requirements, they prioritize working and take a sanction, with some eventually leaving GAIN altogether.

Salma, a mother with four children under eighteen years of age, only one of whom is on her caseload, has been sanctioned for about a year for failing to attend Orientation because she was going to school and working and now works 40 hours per week as an auditor in a dental office. In her effort to make ends meet, she sees working as her primary means of support. But because her income from working alone is not sufficient to support her family, she must rely on her children's portion of the CalWORKs grant that she still receives to make ends meet.

Well, any kind of help helps. I mean, I really do need the help. I mean, I am a single mother, and don't have a really good paying job. So, I just feel like it's a good help.

Salma thinks that sanctions when a participant is working are unfair because GAIN encourages getting a job. When asked if she would like to come into compliance, she said she would like to give the program a try because she has heard that it is a good



experience. Nonetheless, work remains her priority, and she would like to fit GAIN in around her work schedule.

I would like to try it. But, I mean, yea, only if I have time. My days off are Fridays. I'd love to try it on a Friday or whenever.

Like Salma, work, combined with her children's portion of cash aid, became part of Tasha's overall strategy for survival. Tasha is the mother of three children (only one is on CalWORKs) who has been sanctioned for the second time since September 2005 for not going to Orientation because she had found a job. But because her work hours were unpredictable, she could not commit to going Orientation or Job Club or always make the 32 hour per week work requirement. When her case worker told her she would have to do other things in the weeks when she could not get enough work to fulfill the 32 hour a week requirement, she said, "Forget it." At the time of the focus group, she had taken another job working for commission as a model and does not think she will go to GAIN as long as she has work. Because she saw living on welfare as a temporary means of supporting her family anyway, she thought it was better to take the sanction and make up the lost cash aid with a job.

A preference for working over compliance with the program was also explicit in Rosa's experience. A recently divorced mother with three children, she was quite willing to accept a sanction and avoid the time and stress of curing it when she could afford the reduction in aid. She has had multiple sanctions and currently has been in compliance for a year.

When I returned to GAIN to get the aid, they told me that I was sanctioned (She had lost track). There are different times where I have gotten the aid, or I haven't used it since I was working. And last year, when I tell you I got divorced, I was getting help, and I was with my husband. I had a little bit of work. I never knew that the sanctions had been opened...for many years.

Rosa's pattern was especially common among the few men we were able to interview in our focus groups. They report their incomes in order to get money for their kids but do not bother with GAIN work requirements and losing their own aid when they are working and getting by. In fact, Cesar, a married participant with four children (two on aid), had a first sanction that lasted over two years. During that period, he claims that he did not know that he had been sanctioned until he came to the GAIN office for another reason. From his viewpoint, the problem was poor communication with GAIN—not receiving notices and being sent to different offices and caseworkers. In fact, he did not seem to understand exactly why he had been sanctioned. However, like other parents who let sanctions go on, he was not terribly concerned, since he was usually working and getting by with the aid he did receive.

When I was sanctioned, and I don't know why, it was because I was working, I always took my work ID, and they were always changing my GAIN workers... I only learned [about the sanction] when I accompanied my wife [to GAIN] when we had to affirm the assistance that we received. I would ask what happened to GAIN. Why hadn't they called me? They gave me different numbers of different persons. They were different all

of the time. They never said why [I was sanctioned]. One time they sent me to Vermont and Martin Luther King, and another time, they sent me to Beverly, and another time they sent me to El Monte to meet with my social workers. I have complied with all of the GAIN requirements. I went to Long Beach College to do an assessment. I did it, but they never explained why they needed that assessment in Long Beach, and all I wanted was a truck driver license.

Like Cesar, Leshia, the mother of two children, also did not know she had been sanctioned for almost a year. Looking back, she thinks the fact that she was always working is the reason she did not notice the sanction. She chose to work because, as she put it, her money was “always being cut for some reason.” Her confusion over her sanction status was also complicated by the fact that she did not receive her Notice of Action for six months after she did not comply with GAIN requirements. She is aware of the appeals process but resigned herself to “just take the losses” because of “the hassle we just go through everyday.” About her decision to take a sanction rather than comply with the program, she said,

It's not worth it. Like I said, you leave your livelihood up to them. You cut my money today, I don't have rent tomorrow. Seriously, they don't think about it like that...

At the time of the focus group, she had been cured for a week, having decided to comply only after she lost her job and received a letter from GAIN telling her how much money she was losing each month because of her sanction. Still determined, nonetheless, to work and avoid GAIN, Leshia said that when she finds a job that enables her to pay her bills, she will “let the County go in a minute any day.”

Sher who was a member of the short-term sanctioned focus group has relied on GAIN to make ends meet, in her case, off and on over a nine year period. The mother of three children, Sher has a job with the school district and strongly prefers working to being on welfare and participating in GAIN. She has gone to Orientation and Job Club but objects to the fact that each time she goes back to GAIN, she is required to repeat these steps in the program. With a job and family responsibilities to deal with, Sher would also rather work and take a sanction than comply with GAIN requirements.

They humiliate me just for getting some assistance, instead of just saying, “Okay, she works or she has a job.” No, they want us to get paperwork filled out [to verify work], and it's just a hassle.

I think I have to go down there and talk to this GAIN worker. But, you know, I have been running up and down the streets, going to see these County people. I just don't feel like even going to another office... I got so much responsibility. I can barely take them on... Breakfast, dinner, lunch, doctors' appointments, dentist appointments...I sometimes get headaches, and I don't know why, and I think there might be something wrong with my health, you know. I have my family worried about me like maybe you should go check yourself out. I'm so worried about them (children), I'm not thinking about myself. I think they need to quit worrying these mommas... I think they [are] giving us all, these single mothers, a hard time.

These parents' willingness to work and take sanctions rather than participate in GAIN reflects a clash between the parents' priorities and those of the GAIN program. GAIN

sees program compliance as the best path to long-term self-sufficiency. These parents see the immediate survival needs as central and GAIN as secondary to their effort to become self-sufficient and provide for their families. In their view, work had more to offer than GAIN, and they wanted to avoid the program's "bureaucratic hassles" which interfere with work or caretaking responsibilities. They had each taken sanctions as long as they had another means of providing for their families. In an overall strategy for survival, GAIN was a fallback means of support. Participation in GAIN became one means, although not the preferred one, when they could not get work or support themselves in any other way.

### ***When Caretaking Responsibilities Take Priority***

Providing for the well-being of their families was the highest priority, particularly in the lives of long-term sanctioned focus group participants, and a major factor influencing their participation in GAIN. It was a primary reason why some focus group participants failed to go to Orientation or dropped out of GAIN before completing Job Club. The case of Ilena, an immigrant from the Virgin Islands who has been sanctioned since 2004 for failing to attend Orientation, exemplifies these problems. Alone with an infant in a new country when she was called to GAIN, Ilena took the sanction rather than go to Orientation and participate in GAIN because she feared leaving her baby with strangers. Lora, another long-term sanctioned participant, made the same decision because her mother and grandmother, who might have provided child care, live across town, and she was afraid to leave her new baby with someone she does not know.

I had my baby, and I'm not about to leave my baby with someone across the street because I see how she be doing hers or somebody down the street because I don't know these people.

Difficulties getting or finding child care was also the reason some focus group participants gave for leaving CalWORKs. Alicia, a single mother with four children, said that the termination of her child care was the "last straw," a major reason for leaving CalWORKs when she was in compliance. (For her full story, see the section below on "leavers"). In a similar case, Blanca, a single mother, left GAIN with a sanction for not working and moved to another county to live with her mother because she had transportation problems and could not find adequate child care for her young daughter.

Thus, concerns about the availability of quality child care were significant barriers to participation in GAIN as well as reasons for leaving CalWORKs. But what also became clear is that the conflict between GAIN participation and care for children went beyond concerns over finding a place where their children could be cared for properly. For some, especially long-term sanctioned participants, the needs of children and other family members were so great that they could not even consider leaving their care to others in order to seek work outside of the home.

For example, several mothers such as Kari felt they could not leave sick or disabled children to participate in GAIN. The mother of a 12 year-old daughter and a nine year-old son who has severe asthma and Tourette's Syndrome, Kari has been on and

off of aid for several years and most recently sanctioned for about a year. At the time of the focus group, she was sanctioned for failing to go to Orientation because her son's doctor told her that she must be available to pick him up from school in the event of an episode of either disease. Alone with no other family to help care for her son, Kari said she would have gone to Orientation if it had not required being away from home and unavailable for her son for eight hours. She also sees this as a hindrance to working a job that would likely make her unavailable for several hours at a time. As she put the dilemma:

I'm trying to be there for my son. My son's been hospitalized, and when his asthma flares up, he gets really scared, and basically, I'm really the only one that can calm him down...When his Tourette's acts up and everything, I just have to be there just to kind of hold him and talk to him. And he's going through a bad stage of that right now, too...No one really wants to keep my son, and as far as me putting him in the hands of a stranger, I really don't trust them right now because they're not going to do what I would do in his situation, you know, come up to him having the asthma attack, going into his Tourette's because he jumps, shakes, you know, outbursts. You know, they might not know how to go ahead and even deal with it...

If I come down here (to GAIN), I'm on the bus, and I come down here for this class (Orientation), if I get a phone call saying that my son is having a severe asthma attack or his Tourette's is really acting bad or whatever stuff, and he really needs me, it's going to take me on the bus close to two hours to get from down there from where the GAIN building is to my home to see about my son. It's not like my oldest son, he's in college, he's not home. My mother, she's 71 years old, and she has short-term memory, so I can't put her in trust of, I mean, there is no one that I have that I could turn to...I asked them, "Will you put it in writing for me that if I come to this class, that you guys will be held responsible for my son if anything happens?" They told me, "No."

In Oche's case, caretaking responsibilities of a different kind conflicted with participation in GAIN. Oche is the mother of two teenagers, a daughter age 17 and a son who is 15, and she has been sanctioned for two years, her first sanction. After moving into a "dangerous neighborhood" in order to find Section 8 housing, she learned that eight of her son's friends had been shot over the last two years. She stopped participating in GAIN after Orientation because she feels that her work hours would conflict with the need she feels to walk her children to and from school.

The reason why I'm not working right now is because of where I live at, and it's very dangerous over here for my kids, and I've got to make sure my kids come home every, make it home every day from school, especially my 15 year old son, due to the area that I live in... That's the reason why I didn't participate in the activities GAIN was offering because I believe in the activities...But [at] this time, that's not what I needed, I needed them to understand my kids' health come before anybody.

Oche remains sanctioned because she sees as her first responsibility insuring the safety of her children.

Concerns about the needs of her family also led Reyna to choose a sanction, her first, over participation in GAIN. A single mother with four children ranging in age from nine to 16 years of age, Reyna applied for aid seven months ago when her boyfriend and father of her children went to jail. She went to Orientation but early-on started having

difficulty getting back and forth to GAIN activities and taking her children to child care. But the added strain from a series of tragedies over the next three months—the death of one brother and her other brother going to jail—led to giving priority to care for her family, with participation in GAIN, as she put it, being “the last thing on my mind.”

It's just so much..., so it's like my kids..., it's been really a strain on them, and you know..., I have to be there to comfort them, and it's really hard on my mom. She had almost like a nervous breakdown, and she had got really sick after my brother passed away...And, I, you know, was just helping her, and, you know, my kids and my nephews and my brother when he passed, he had four kids, and my older nephews took it really hard.

At the time (Orientation), it was like, I can only do so much, you know, and I figured, I mean, it was like my family needed me more. I know that it could have helped me out, and I could have benefited from that, but to me, the way I was raised, it's like, I have to be there for my family, you know.

Rosa, a single mother who has been in compliance for a year after multiple sanctions is considering taking a sanction because she cannot fulfill her current work requirements and take care of her own three children plus her four nieces and nephews who came to live with her after her sister was deported to Mexico. Two of her sister's children require special care because of problems resulting from sexual molestation by a relative. Now Rosa faces another sanction because she is short two of her 32-hour work requirement. GAIN wanted her to make the hours on Saturdays, a time when she feels she needs to be there for her family. Adding to Rosa's stress is the fact that although she has only temporary guardianship of her sister's children, her case worker claims that they cannot get aid unless she adopts them.

I have to work at a school on Saturdays so I can complete the hours. But how am I going to leave the children on Saturday? And Saturday and Sunday is when I'm with them at home. I have to wash and go to the market. And that's what makes it difficult... I would prefer that they removed me from the GAIN assistance than to participate in the programs because I feel extremely pressured. The littlest child is four years old. And the children require a lot of, a lot of help in school, in everything because they have mental problems. They need my time. I have three and four from my sister. There are seven children in the home, and I'm by myself alone as the only adult. I get up at 6:00 in the morning to give them breakfast. At 8:00, they are all in school. At 8:30, I go to the work. At 3:30, I return home, pick up half of the kids at school. At 6:00 p.m., everybody has to be eating and 8:00 the same for the next day. What time do I have to go to a GAIN?

I feel very pressured. I'm torn because I can't handle the children's situation and GAIN... I'm taking medication. I'm stressed. I almost had an embolism about two weeks ago.

Five of the six women with long-term sanctions and three of the six short-term and first sanction participants said that caretaking responsibilities were the main reason they could not participate in GAIN activities. But while sanctioned for non-participation, all except for those with health problems had a strong desire to work and become self-sufficient. Several wanted to participate in GAIN later on because they thought it could help them to reach their goal of self-sufficiency. Reyna, for example, feels the crisis in her family is nearly over and is starting to look for work. She will either go to work or into GAIN if her job search is unsuccessful, “whichever comes first.” Oche, who

has some college education and previously worked as pre-school teacher, plans to return to GAIN next year when her father will get her daughter a car that will enable her to accompany the son to school. She believes that GAIN can help her progress toward self-sufficiency and even dreams of one day becoming one of the “inspirational speakers” who encourages new GAIN participants during Orientation. But in the meantime, each of these women remains sanctioned as a result of the clash between GAIN requirements and rules and the priority they place on the responsibilities for the children in their care.

### ***When Health Needs Are Not Met***

The health problems that were significant barriers to participation in the first study of sanctions also figure prominently in this study. Already struggling with chronic health problems, participants were unable to hold up under the additional demands of the program. In addition to her caretaking responsibilities for her disabled daughter’s son, Sondra has chronic back problems that made it impossible to walk the distances to catch the bus she would need to take to participate in GAIN activities and to work. She participated in Orientation and started Job Club but was having problems getting child care. When she missed three sessions and was told she would have to start all over again, she never went back. When asked if she considered applying for a Medi-Cal exemption, she seems resigned and doubtful that her problems would be viewed as serious enough for an exemption to be granted.

Because see, I have bronchitis, number one, I have, uh, like I said, I stay on 85<sup>th</sup> and Vermont... By the time each morning I would get up to go to the GAIN for the little time that I get to the bus stop, my back is tore up, you know. I couldn’t bear that every morning. Now, if I went to the doctor, you know, I don’t know what they might see or what they might not see, but I know what my body feels. But if I didn’t have it in writing, you know, they don’t want to hear it. So, I figured, why waste my time?

Mary, a single mother with a three-year old son left CalWORKs while she was on her first sanction. Deaf in one ear, she had trouble hearing and participating in the group sessions of Job Club. She asked for some accommodation for her disability, but because there was no apparent solution, she was sanctioned for not attending. Like Sondra, the program could not accommodate her disability which was not serious enough to put her into the official category of disability, so she got sanctioned.

I’m deaf in my left ear so I can’t hear anything at all. They were telling me to come in for the GAIN program. The classroom—I told them I can’t be in a big classroom with a lot of people. A small group is fine, I can hear. I can’t be in a big classroom. They didn’t understand that... I let them know, “If I have a smaller group, I can come, but otherwise, I can’t...” They just said “No, you need to be there... Even when I went to go see the workers, and I’ve asked them—because it’s real loud, and I asked them, “Can you please speak up?” They seem to get a little bothered with it.

Clara, a single mother with three children and currently in compliance, told about how her health problems led to a previous sanction for not working. Before coming to GAIN, the father of her younger daughter attempted to kill her and burn down their house while her daughter watched. A court decision separated the “schizophrenic” father from the

family and suggested that Clara enroll in GAIN. She did get some psychological counseling but soon developed a serious condition that prevented her from working. When she asked for a health exemption, her case worker was skeptical and wanted formal proof from a doctor. Unfortunately, it took three months and three doctors before one gave Clara an exam thorough enough to reveal her need for a hysterectomy. In the meantime, she suffered extreme pain and was sanctioned for not working.

When GAIN called, they explained that they wanted to find work for me or put me in school. I told them that I couldn't go to school or work because I had severe pain and the bleeding that was going on. But they said that I had to return to the doctors so that they could give me disability. I would say, "I'm going continually to the doctor," and they say that the tumor is very small. My abdomen was getting bigger. The bleeding was no longer light but heavy. I explained that instead of feeling better, I was feeling worse... Every time that they (GAIN) called, I go, and I would take the doctor papers. But the doctor didn't put emergency on the top of the paper. They told me that if the doctor didn't fill out the emergency papers, I was going to be sanctioned for not applying for work or school. They sent me a letter that I would receive less money and less Food Stamps.

When GAIN gave me a sanction, I was gravely ill. As they (other parents in the focus group) said, there is no understanding of health issues, but they just want proof that you can do and you have to do. I explained to them that I was dying. I couldn't see in front of me. They said they had to follow their process, that they are told to do their job, and I need to comply. I told her that I was going to go to another doctor and see what the other doctor said. Then the other doctor came and did the laparoscopy, and it came out apart from the tumor there came out two large masses... They got rooted in the uterus. That's why I was bleeding so much. I lived with constant pain, like you are going to have a baby. The pain was for many months. He said it was an emergency operation. I told the worker and told him what was happening and he said, "Take this paper to the doctor, and he should fill it out." The doctor sent it, and he asked for permission from the Medi-Cal to be able to operate on me. The doctor said he was going to cut the ovaries, cut everything because nothing was working. In two to three months I was operated on -- during all that time of suffering, they continued with their sanction.

Like Clara, Olivia, a single mother with one son and currently in compliance after multiple sanctions, talked about her sanction for not working, although she had severe health problems. In her case, she had a legitimate reason for not working -- an operation and a doctor's excuse. However, unlike Clara, she was illiterate, had communication problems, and did not contest the sanction because she wanted to avoid the stress of dealing with GAIN:

Recently, when I was sick, those three months that I didn't work...I didn't write it down (the causes) because I'm afraid...I have proof from the doctor. I was in the hospital doing examinations and everything, but I didn't write down any changes [in my situation] because then if you make a change, they start with other problems...They pressure you a lot...I would like to get out of the program because there is too much pressure.

A prominent word in the vocabulary of many participants was stress due to the pressures of work, program requirements, paying bills, and taking care of children. For some, their stress was exacerbated or caused by domestic abuse, mental illness, and physical health problems, sometimes in combination. Three out of six women in a group of participants who had been "cured" after long sanctions experienced domestic

abuse and benefited from some psychological counseling in GAIN but saw their immediate problems of noncompliance as having other causes. Candi, a woman in another group with long-term sanctions, said she felt depressed a lot of the time when trying to complete Job Club because she was worried she would not be able to pay her rent if she did not fulfill the job search quotas. She received Specialized Supportive Services for Mental Health for two years but “didn’t get well.” In the end, she took a sanction, saying that while the money helped, it was not worth it.

In the leaver focus group, Patricia, a single mother with a daughter of 14, was officially listed as having left CalWORKs while in compliance with GAIN. In the focus group, she admitted to, and manifested symptoms of, mental as well as physical health problems and claimed that at one point, GAIN had put her in a “mental hospital.” Currently, Patricia and her daughter are barely surviving on disability, Medi-Cal, and food from a shelter. She was confused about the relation between her health problems and leaving GAIN:

I don’t know when I left. I didn’t leave. They just canceled my Food Stamps and my benefits.

### ***When Transportation Needs Are Not Met***

In County of Los Angeles, noted for cars and freeways, welfare parents often count on buses to fulfill their work requirements and family obligations. Candi, the long-term sanctioned participant described above, talked about what it is like trying to use the bus as her primary means of transportation.

You are trying to take care of a household, and you don’t have transportation, and you have children, obviously, and there are doctor’s appointments, dentist appointments, eye appointments, school problems, homework, your life... I mean, then try and get a job, and then you don’t get paid for it (transportation support).

GAIN requirements to attend Job Club and travel to work actually create additional demands for travel and expense to participants’ already difficult transportation problems. Candi feels that transportation problems were the main reason she dropped out of Job Club. Living far from her Job Club site, she could not fill the daily job application quotas and was often late to interviews because of the long distances she had to travel on the bus.

Lack of transportation also affected Ilena’s ability to participate in GAIN activities. Ilena never participated in GAIN activities because she lacked transportation as well as child care. And Lora, who like Ilena was reluctant to leave her children with strangers, lacked the means to travel across town where her mother or grandmother could provide child care that she could trust. The examples of Lora and Ilena, both long-term sanctioned participants whose child care barriers are described above, show that parents often did not experience barriers to participation in GAIN singly or in isolation. Transportation was another major reason that they did not participate in GAIN, one that complicated and made their other problems worse.



While GAIN assists participants with transportation support, several compliant parents complained about the effects of not getting promised passes on time. Rosa, a single mother in compliance after multiple sanctions, feared the consequences of not receiving bus fare when she was in Orientation.

They (GAIN) sent me to look for work from 8:00 in the morning until 4:00 in the afternoon. And if not, they would give us another week of that. There were two months of program. The money for the bus fare didn't come in time to be used... If you think about the money that they give us, you pay the rent, it's not enough for clothing much less for the bus. What do they want us to do?

Marta, a single mother in the same focus group with parents who were currently in compliance after a long sanction, expressed similar fears.

You're in class. The money doesn't arrive for the bus, and you have to start with the process from the very beginning, when it's not our fault that they don't send the money for the bus.

When she was sanctioned, Isabel, a single mother with a 12 year-old daughter, had been in compliance for almost a year. However, she remembers vividly the impact of not having enough money for bus fare when she was sanctioned for not attending an appointment. She feared for the health and safety of her daughter because she could not pay for her bus fare to school.

It was a real complication, the rent, bills, food. I couldn't buy the bus pass for my daughter. She had to walk from home to school and school to home, and it didn't matter what the weather was like, if it was hot or cold. It was very hard for me. Apart from the fact that she got sick, she would get tired, she was at risk. It's not the same to get the bus at the corner and get down and go into school as to walk to and from school...She would walk alone more than ten blocks. She was about ten years old. When that was going on, I considered it to have been a risk situation.

Parents who were sanctioned complained that they often did not have money for buses once rent, utilities, and food exhausted their resources. Those who were compliant had additional transportation obligations including getting themselves to GAIN activities and getting their kids to school. They needed their transportation money on time or face sanctions. Rosa, the participant discussed above, also worried about how she would be able to afford transportation to and from work at a low-wage job if she completed GAIN and could no longer receive transportation support. Transportation is generally an endemic problem for the poor who are trying to work and take care of their family obligations. The findings in this report echo those extensively documented by survey and focus group methods in an earlier study completed by County of Los Angeles.<sup>55</sup>

## **2) Program Barriers to Compliance**

Participants sometimes fail to comply with GAIN when their life situations and priorities clash with program rules and requirements. They may also fail to comply and receive sanctions because of perceived technical breakdowns in the delivery of information and

poor communication with case workers. In the following cases, these problems may have led to lack of knowledge about requirements, misinformation, negativity toward the program, and, ultimately, sanctions.

### ***Lack of Knowledge***

As noted in the participant survey and in the focus groups conducted for the first sanction report, parents sometimes get sanctioned because they do not understand GAIN requirements or do not receive timely notifications of appointments or for failure to adhere to the rules. Salma, a short-term sanctioned participant, was confused about sanctions. She did not know that she had to go to Orientation and Job Club to keep the full amount of her aid. And while she knew that her aid had been reduced, she did not know if she was getting cash aid for her daughter or for herself. Lack of knowledge was also the cause of Isabel's first sanction that left her without money for her daughter's bus pass. New to GAIN, she initially did not even know the meaning of "sanction" and never contested her sanction when she found out. As with some other participants, her communication problem was two-fold --- a lack of knowledge about the program and inaction on her part and the failure of GAIN to deliver a written Notice of Action or to contact her by phone regarding her sanction.

I was sanctioned. I hadn't received correspondence from them. If I don't receive correspondence, I can't know that I have an appointment with them. Then, I found out the sanction was in place. The GAIN social worker sent me an appointment. I did not receive it, and I didn't go to the appointment, and they sanctioned me. Also, I didn't even know what a sanction was...They reduced it (cash aid) for about four months.

### ***Miscommunication and Misinformation***

For whatever reason, these participants were not aware of GAIN requirements or that failure to participate would result in a sanction. Sondra who had a long sanction was also not aware that she would lose cash aid if she did not participate in GAIN until she received her Notice of Action. But in her case, the problem was misinformation that she apparently received from her Eligibility Worker who told her during a yearly review that because she was caring for her grandson who was on the CalWORKs caseload, she would not have to participate in GAIN.

Marta's first sanction seems to have been caused by some combination of miscommunication and misinformation. Currently in compliance for a year, she believes that she was wrongly sanctioned for not meeting an appointment with her case worker. When she told him that the appointment interfered with a job interview, he advised her to go to the job interview and said he would note that she had met with him. She did not get the job, but she got sanctioned for missing her appointment with her case worker. She did not understand that she had to meet with him if she did not get the job. She complained to her case worker about the miscommunication but lacked the knowledge to carry her complaint further. At the time, she did not know the meaning of "good cause."

They didn't inform me in a timely manner, the letter (Notice of Action) arrived when I was waiting for my next check, saying that I didn't have the right to the money, the help. What the social worker did not explain to me was that if they didn't give the job, I should return to him. He never told me anything about that. That was my problem that I didn't know I had to return to tell him what had happened. I thought I had met my commitment...Later I complained, and they didn't pay attention to me.

### ***Frequent Changes in Case Workers***

In several cases, these communication problems seemed to be linked to frequent changes in caseworkers. A number of participants reported problems when they attempted to find out why they had been sanctioned or how to return to compliance and found that their cases had been assigned to new workers. For example, after being sanctioned, Salma, a short-term sanctioned participant, told her worker that she was in school and that she might be getting a job. He gave her a school verification form to fill out and said that he would find out if the money that had already been deducted from her cash aid could be reimbursed. But that was the last Salma heard from him. She got a job and has not tried to contact GAIN again after learning that she is no longer assigned to the same worker.

Tasha, another short-term sanctioned parent, was also sanctioned after communication with her worker broke down. She received her first sanction after missing Orientation when she went to New Jersey for two weeks so that her daughter could visit her mother. She called her worker to reschedule but never heard back from him. She said she had not realized that she would be sanctioned for missing Orientation. In the meantime, she was in a car accident and learned she had been reassigned to a new worker. She was trying to contact him when she received the Notice of Action. By the time of the focus group, she had decided to look for a job rather than go to GAIN.

Also a short-term participant, Leshia lacked knowledge about the sanctions process and did not even realize that she had been sanctioned until recently when she learned that she has been sanctioned for almost a year. She thinks she did not notice the sanction because she was working and because, as she put it, her "money is always being cut for something." When she got a new case worker, she asked for an explanation, but even he could not explain why she was sanctioned. She now thinks that she was supposed to turn in paperwork every three months to verify her volunteer work which she used to fulfill her 32 hour per week work requirement but became non-compliant during the three months of summer vacation at the job. She did not get a Notice of Action until December although she had stopped complying in June.

These cases suggest that frequent changing of case workers can hinder the flow of information and communication between participants and contribute to compliance problems.

## ***Language Problems***

Rosa, the mother who was having a difficult time working 32 hours and taking care of her three children in addition to four more from her deported sister, complained about the time and inconvenience caused by not receiving information in Spanish and not being able to get the information by phone in Spanish.

They send me the papers of information from here (GAIN or CalWORKs) through the mail. It is my understanding that when you complete the application, they ask you what language you would prefer to receive, Spanish or English? Even if you put Spanish, they put it in English. And if you call and call to ask about the papers, they never help you. "Come here, you already have the appointment, and you go in without a problem." That's exactly what happened last week. I called the worker, and he never assisted me until I came to look for him, and I told him that I needed to know what this was. I asked, "Why do they send it to me in English?" He said, "Whatever you don't understand, you can come and ask." For me, it's a lot of pressure....they should give you some time to do some things with the children and then time for the GAIN. The job they will give me is permanent. But these two hours that I'm short, they are going to sanction me again. I understand that that's how it's going to be. But I can't do other than that.

## ***Disrespect***

A closely related problem that has recurred in the focus groups conducted over the years is that some participants feel that they are frequently looked down upon and stereotyped as free-loaders who could do better if they just tried harder and stopped making excuses to avoid supporting themselves. Most of the parents in the groups expected to work and wanted respect and understanding of the obstacles they face from their caseworkers. Concerns about not getting respect were especially pronounced among Spanish-speaking participants who felt doubly stigmatized because they were poor immigrants and did not speak English well. Although the researchers did not raise the issue, if a participant brought up this problem, others would invariably mention their experiences with disrespect. Most recently, this happened in the focus group with Spanish-speaking participants who had been cured for a year after varied histories of sanctions.

Clara, after telling her dramatic story about being sanctioned for not working while she had very serious health problems, had this to say about her case workers:

I would like that they be more humane. ...there are a lot of women with terrible conditions. They have no support to understand the situation. It's only rule, rules, rules. We are not robots. We have human tension, psychological problems. They don't have understanding or humanity. Just sanction or disappear from the system.

At this point, many voices spoke in agreement, and one said:

I had a tumor in my head for 14 months. It was this size only (small)... Why don't they understand us when we explain to them? ...We shouldn't have to tell lies so that they will believe us. Without bringing up races, but there are races that have opulent cars, designer clothes, they park in front.

Olivia, the single mother who was illiterate and fearful to contest what she considered to be unjust sanctions, also addressed the issue of respect:

They (case workers) make you feel very bad because you have many needs... and I'm going to tell you something. If I didn't need the money, I would not ask for it. But, unfortunately, like one of them told me, "I don't know why you come to this country and have so many children." And I told them I only have one, and I'm asking you because I need it. But I told him, "I'm not judging anyone." He said, "Yes, and at day you don't have a husband, but at night there they all come." And I told him that that wasn't my problem. And simply, I just come to ask for help because I need it I told him. There are people that try to help you, but there are some who start to degrade you.

Cesar, a member of the same focus group with parents who had come into compliance after multiple and single sanctions, echoed her feelings.

What is the purpose of GAIN? Is it an organization that tries to help you, to educate you, but in a good way...They give us work or they give us school. It's not bad. The situation is the way they apply it on us. We try to comply with everything they need because we need the program. But if we feel in certain situations that we are mistreated when we don't go where we are commanded to go, you feel humiliated. It's very hard to fight the system that's been in place for years. I don't know if we are going to continue with these focus groups, but I would like to. Also don't just interview us, who are so affected, but also interview them (case workers) so that they can see and make a balance.

I would like it if you could come one day to visit a GAIN office and see how we are treated.

Similar remarks were made in two of the English-speaking focus groups. Ellie, a long-term sanctioned participant who feels that there should be more flexibility in applying the rules about exemptions, said, "The majority of workers have an attitude. They say, 'We can't help you unless you do what we tell you,' and then you suffer." Kari, a short-term sanctioned participant who takes care of her disabled son, said that she feels it is useless to appeal her sanction because the workers might retaliate.

...They do what they want to do regardless anyway. And my thing is, if I go ahead and kick at them, they might go ahead and just completely cut me off.

Tracy, a sanctioned leaver who had a strong sense of her own importance as a human being, had this to say about the attitude of some of the case workers:

A lot of the workers talk down to you like you are uneducated, ignorant, and you are lazy because you have to come here for help. I've worked all my life. Before I had to get on aid, I know I'm making more money than a lot of them that are sitting at that desk. How dare you insult me like that! Some of the same individuals, the workers, they get on aid. So that really baffles me. You would think they would have a more caring and understanding attitude.

### ***The Importance of "Good" Case Workers***

The above examples of perceived disrespect and other communication problems that led to sanctions highlight the importance of frequent, consistent, and close relations

between participants and case workers who understand participants' situations and encourage compliance. In the first sanction report, a participant strongly expressed this view. When she was asked, "Do sanctions encourage parents to fulfill their welfare to work plans?" she said, "Not really. It has more to do with the individual workers than the rules. If people care about you, you do better and don't break the rules." This view was also expressed by a GSW who preferred to work flexibly with noncompliant parents by giving them "chances," rather than inflexibly applying sanction rules: "We are not out to sanction people, absolutely not. We want to help our participants...We want them to come in so they can participate and see GAIN as a benefit."

Parents who had left CalWORKs drew on their experiences in the program to give examples of "good" case workers, but also noted that even these workers can be hampered by heavy caseloads, computer errors, and inflexible sanction rules. From this perspective, the parents argued that GSWs were usually more helpful than EWs whose work was limited by heavier caseloads and frequent computer errors that led to unexplained changes in the amounts of monthly aid. Angela and Alicia, two leavers, discussed the difference between GSWs and EWs.

Angela: All this time that I was on it (GAIN), there are good workers. They'll try to fix whatever problems. They'll go out of their way—especially the GAIN people, they are real good on helping you. I can't speak the same about CalWORKs. I think it has to do with a lot of the work they have.

Facilitator: So you're saying you had more problems with Eligibility Workers than the GAIN workers?

Angela: 100 percent. (Nods of agreement from others)

Alicia: Yes because they (EWs) are the ones that a lot of times that you turn in the paperwork to, and the computer just messes up.

This discussion among Leavers about EWs and GSWs is important because it highlights the fact that participants have to deal with both, and they experience them as part of the same welfare system. As a consequence, problems with EWs can negatively affect compliance with GAIN and contribute to sanctions and decision to leave GAIN. Although the emphasis in focus groups was on GAIN, parents often want to talk about trouble with EWs and CalWORKs.

Leavers also argued that even their "good" GSWs were hampered by rigid rules, which they thought were the major causes of their noncompliance. In this following case, a parent praised her GSW but complained that rigid rules prevented him from accepting signed papers by mail or fax.

Cara: In my experience, they (GSWs) are really good. They just take the time—like when I was working, the worker was working with me. I was like, "I'm working part-time. I cannot be skipping always just to come in and turn a paper in." All they do is just see you, sign the paper, and you are gone. Can't I just fax it or mail it?

We asked Alicia to talk about any positive things she got out of GAIN, even though she ended up leaving.

GAIN to me, they put everything on the table except when it came down to sending those letters that they didn't have anymore funds for child care. That was my problem (i.e. she expected paid child care). Other than that, they help you out a lot. They do open doors to you, and it's up to us to take advantage of what they are offering you which is a lot.

Mary praised her case worker but noted that he ultimately could not help her because his hands were tied by rigid work rules:

The positive things—my worker would go beyond the call of duty. I started school the first week—they hadn't given me—I think it was like \$250 they were going to give me to help me with my books. I had an appointment to come see him (case worker) that day, and they were supposed to give me the check. All the supervisors were all gone to a funeral for another coworker. I'm sorry that person has passed on, but how do you leave and let all the supervisors go? I wasn't leaving there without that check. I was in school already, and I didn't want to get behind. I stayed there probably for about three hours. He kept pushing until he found somebody to sign that check for me. He saw I was determined.

He was frustrated when they were trying to make me work in between that school schedule (her major problem), but it was out of his hands. I didn't agree with that. I don't like the way they have you limited to the classes that they'll back you up in school. I think they should widen the horizon.

Participants appreciated the efforts of caseworkers who attempt to be helpful and work with their situations, even if these efforts proved to be unsuccessful because of program rules and constraints.

### **3) Leaving CalWORKs**

Why do some parents leave CalWORKs and give up all their benefits, including those of GAIN? How widespread is the phenomenon of leaving? According to administrative records reported in the first sanction study, 60 percent of sanctioned participants left CalWORKs during the first year while being sanctioned. The following section explores what participants in a focus group said about their reasons for leaving and how they were doing about six months later. It also explores similarities and differences between chronically sanctioned participants and leavers.

#### ***Chronically Sanctioned Parents as Potential Leavers***

In some ways, leavers are like chronically sanctioned parents whose patterns of noncompliance are outcomes of a clash between their priorities and needs and program requirements. In both cases, participants' personal needs and priorities tend to outweigh the benefits of aid. For example, Cesar and Rosa paid little attention to their long sanctions because they were working and could make do without the adult portion of their cash aid. Nevertheless, they depended on the other family aid offered by GAIN. The potential leavers are also like parents who become sanctioned because they are alienated from the program and have weak ties to case workers. Salma appreciated the

worker who went out of his way to assist her go to school. But the bond that had been established with GAIN was broken when her case was reassigned to another worker. After that, she never returned to the program and has remained sanctioned for about a year. Leshia thinks that more contact with her worker could have helped her adhere to the rules and avoid a sanction. However, now she has resigned herself to “just take the losses” because of the “hassles we go through everyday.” Finally, Lora who has a long-term sanction said about GAIN, “Forget this (GAIN). I don’t need to go through this,” because of the “bad attitude” of workers who “leave you out on your own” and “talk with you like you’re nothing.”

Olivia, a single mother who came into compliance after multiple sanctions, is definitely a potential leaver. In fact, she admitted that she came to the focus group in the hope of getting some help with her plan to leave CalWORKs. She recently had a legitimate reason for not-working and avoiding a sanction, an operation and a doctor’s excuse, but she put up with a sanction because she wanted to avoid the stress of dealing with GAIN:

Recently when I was sick, those three months that I didn't work...I didn't write it down (the causes) because I'm afraid...I have proof from the doctor. I was in the hospital doing examinations and everything, but I didn't write down any changes [in my situation] because then if you make a change, they start with other problems...They pressure you a lot...I would like to get out of the program because there is too much pressure.

The breakdown in her communication with GAIN was exacerbated by the fact that she only understood Spanish and was unable to read and write. Her stress in GAIN was so great that she was looking for alternative sources of aid and help.

### ***When Leaving Outweighs the Benefits of CalWORKs***

In a sense, leaving is an extension of problems identified by chronically sanctioned participants but with a difference. For one thing, decisions to leave had potentially more serious and lasting consequences, since it meant losing all family benefits. However, two convictions tended to support leaving: 1) At some level, GAIN wasn’t working for them; and 2) They just might make it without the benefits and pressures of GAIN. The last conviction did not mean that participants suddenly had won the lottery or landed a good-paying job. None in our focus group had an evident road to security when they left, and only two out of the six interviewed had a history of more than low-paying jobs. For the rest, leaving meant uncertainty and the need to piece together their survival from low-paid jobs, the informal market, family support, and alternate forms of federal, state, and local welfare.

Another trait of leavers was their tendency to evaluate their immediate problems with compliance in the larger context of their accumulated experience in the whole CalWORKs program. This evaluation takes into account their experiences with eligibility requirements and Eligibility Workers. As pointed out in their discussions of “good” and “bad” case workers, problems with EWs and CalWORKs requirements were sometimes significant enough to outweigh the benefits of GAIN and led to leaving the



whole program. While the focus of this report has been on GAIN sanctions, findings of this research suggest that to understand noncompliance, sanctions, and leaving, researchers need to look at all the related parts of the CalWORKs program—GAIN and CalWORKs, GSWs and EWs, and the experience of being in the often old, crowded, and depressing CalWORKs offices as well as the bright and relatively new GAIN offices.

The following case studies detail some of the reasons why parents left GAIN and how their many needs and experiences with the program are connected to leaving.

### ***Why Alicia Left: A Problem With Child Care Was the “Last Straw”***

Alicia lives alone with her four children ages two to fifteen. She attended Orientation and Job Club, and after a first, long sanction has been compliant for the past three years, most currently, working as an assistant in an office for 32 hours weekly at \$9.00 an hour. She is a welfare veteran who understands the system and knows how to speak up for her rights. The “last straw” in her decision to quit GAIN was the notice telling her that GAIN would no longer pay money to her mother who had been providing child care. Alicia saw this as breaking the agreement she had with GAIN. As a result, she threatened to leave her job, and facing a sanction, left CalWORKs before she was officially sanctioned.

I told my worker that we made a deal that you guys were going to help me out until I was completely set. She said, “If you quit [your job], then we are going to stop all your benefits.” I wasn’t getting that much, but it was helping.

When her GSW offered no help with child care, Alicia talked to the Supervisor but left work and GAIN when she did not get a response.

By that point, I had already talked to a Supervisor. Once again, “Come in, bring in the paperwork, and I’ll take a look at your case, and I’ll get back to you.” Two weeks passed by. To me it was way too much time to be expecting a phone call back.

However, Alicia’s decision to leave was influenced by an accumulation of problems with the program. For example, once her daughter suddenly had lost all of her benefits for four months because of an inexplicable error. When Alicia finally had time to resolve the situation after talking with a Supervisor and having a hearing, she got the missing aid but had to pay it back.

I cut it off because I was having a lot of problems...I’ve had bad and good experiences, it all depends on the worker. If they do their job, then your case is set. If you turn in your work stubs, and they handle it incorrectly—for example there was a point where my 13-year old daughter, I was turning in the work stubs, and I was receiving less than what I was supposed to. I was like, well, don’t they say that work pays and all that? I completed the Job Club. I was working, and they had my daughter off completely from Medi-Cal, Food Stamps, and cash aid. I let it go for about four months. Then one day, I had the day off, and I called, and it turned out to be that they didn’t have her on, and they never gave me an explanation why. “We’ll just add her on.” It’s always the computer. You are the one that puts the information in the computer for the computer to do whatever they do. Like I said, I’ve have good and bad.

The tricky thing about this is they pay you, and then they take it off. One of the workers this last time, I told her, "How come I'm not receiving the entire what I'm supposed to?" and she said, "Well, even if I give it to you, even if I put it in the computer, and you go and pick up your benefits, we'll still going to take it from you." [I said] like what do you mean?

Alicia summed up why she left the program with an opinion that other focus group members agreed with.

I just got disappointed—I got all pumped up because I saw all these opportunities, and then one thing, and then another—I just decided not to continue on .[They say], "Send your paperwork, bring your paperwork in." They weren't doing anything. It just piles up. When they do that, I guess I speak for everybody—it's the last straw.  
(Nods of agreement)

Seven months later, Alicia is struggling to get by with the help of her mother (baby-sitting), her brothers (food and clothes from the Goodwill), and Medi-Cal aid. Besides, she knows how to hustle up work.

I baby sit kids, and I do yard sales and housecleaning and whatever else. It's more satisfying in a lot of ways because the more houses I clean, the more money. I know what I'm getting. With the welfare, it's whatever the computer decides on sending you, that's what you are going to get.

### ***Cara: GAIN's Requirements Hindered Her Career Goals***

Cara, a mother with a 15 year-old son, had been in compliance for a year after a history of multiple sanctions. She had some college education and a history of secretarial work. Unlike Alicia, she was a relative newcomer to GAIN and had better prospects for moving out of poverty. When she lost her job, could not find another, and ran out of unemployment, she joined GAIN. She saw the program originally as an opportunity to move ahead in life by improving her education and work skills. She was disappointed that this did not happen, left while compliant, and has done well on her own. She describes her experience with GAIN—her frustration and a GSW who went out of his way to set up an education program. But in the end, she couldn't find the necessary hours to make up the 32 a week work requirement.

I decided to go back to school. I wanted to go back and finish my bachelors...it's been years since I've gone back to school. I wanted to go to start taking some classes. My major is art. I had the most difficult time to get them to help me with school because they wanted me to take something clerical. I've done clerical all my life. I type 113 words a minute. I've always worked. I had to battle with them. I had a good worker. The GAIN worker I had, he really worked with me in order for them to give me money and help me with my books and what not. After I start school, I'm taking 16, a full load, they tell me that the hours I'm attending school I was short like 12-16 hours. So I had to get a part-time job. Now, I'm going to school all these different hours during the day. I could not find anyone that was going to let me work in those 16 hours in between my school schedule. So they kept sending me letters that I had to find a job. I checked on campus, everywhere. I could not find anything to work in with that schedule. I'm already registered in school. I'm already participating in my classes. I would have had to drop the classes to try to work. I got so frustrated with it, I just decided ... I got on the Internet -- Hotjobs.com

-- and started e-mailing my resume. I just dropped school and decided to go back to work full-time.

Cara believed that the rigidity of GAIN's work requirements hampered her ability to go to school and move toward independence:

I think it's really unfair because there are a lot of men and women that do want to go to school to better themselves that don't have any skills. I think they should have a program set up for something that's going to be totally of your interest. You are more apt to complete it and not be restricted to a certain list of what they have and require for you. And I think it's a big problem, so it's discouraging to a lot of people.

Interviewed seven months after leaving, she had landed a secretarial job within walking distance from her apartment, married a man "with a really good income," and will soon enroll in art classes in preparation for a career change. She was one of our two success stories to appear in this research.

***Tracy: "They're Too Nosy and My Work and Income Reports are Disappearing in a Black Hole"***

Tracy lives with her 12-year old daughter and had a history of multiple sanctions. Because she was always working, she never really participated in GAIN and had limited contacts with its case workers. Most of her problems seemed to center on reporting work hours and income and dealing with EWs. Problems at this level soured her experience with the whole welfare system, including GAIN. When, she received a Notice of Action about not receiving her work hours, she did not contact her case worker, was fed up with the whole program, and left without knowing whether or not she was sanctioned (she was in fact sanctioned.)

I was always crying, and I just felt that I didn't want to deal with them at all, and I did it on my own. [I'm] still struggling, but I'm doing it without the help of GAIN...every so many months now you send in the CW7 form or whatever, and you mail it in, and they say they never got it. It never came back to you through the mail, but they never got it. Then they cut you off. Then you have to come down here, stand in line. There is a black hole. Where does all this paperwork go when they say they don't get it, you know.

The first time you are like, "Okay, maybe it got lost in the mail," but when it has happened over and over, you tend to see that it's a pattern. It's the workers; it's the people that they have that are not doing their jobs properly because it shouldn't happen over and over.

**Tracy also complained about lack of privacy and never getting enough money to get by.**

They want to know everything about you. Your income, how much you are making, if anyone else is supporting you or helping you. Yes, they are, but I'm still trying to make ends meet on my own. I mean, I have to pay rent \$755. What I was receiving from welfare was nothing. I could never meet my ends with just welfare so I knew I had to work...For me it was more of a hassle dealing with GAIN and CalWORKs, and you have to report everything, and you are still broke. You don't have enough money to make ends meet. I just did it on my own and decided to leave the program altogether. They were too nosy.

But like Cara, Tracy's leaving GAIN resulted in a success story. With financial help from her mother and a landlord flexible about rent payments, she survived the hard times and finally found a full-time job as an office assistant with the school board.

I've been off aid for about a year and a half now. I'm gainfully employed... I'm very happy about that. I have benefits (pension and Medi-Cal) for my daughter and myself, the whole package.

### ***Mary: An Accumulation of Problems***

Mary is a single parent with a three-year old son. We asked her why she left CalWORKs.

Well frankly, I just got tired of dealing with the system. I was struggling, and for them to just tell me, "No," telling me I'm lying, telling me the father is in the home, and I'm like, "Can you prove this to me? Do you know for a fact he's here? Can you prove this to me? I don't see him." I just got tired of dealing with the system. It's just not working. I'd rather struggle on my own than try to deal with somebody else.

In addition to the investigation, she was sanctioned because GAIN could not deal with her pattern of work.

I think they sanctioned me because I was supposed to show proof of income, and I wasn't working at the time. I work for a security company. I still work for them, but at the time I wasn't, but they still have me in the system. I can go back anytime. So they were asking me for pay stubs, and I said I didn't have none. The social worker is telling me, "I know you are working." I'm not working. She was also asking me for my son's father, his paycheck stubs and that he needed to come in with me. He comes and sees his son, but we have no relationship. She told me, "We know he lives in the home with you." He doesn't. The supervisor said, "We know for a fact he's there in your home. Don't lie to us."

Moreover, as noted earlier in the section on health problems, Mary also complained that GAIN never dealt with the fact that she was deaf in one ear, a disability that limited her participation in Job Club. Finally, Mary also described frequent communication problems with her case worker:

They are always switching my case worker. I never know who my case worker is. They always switch it every month. I call and they are like, "No, you need to call..." Then every time they changed workers, you had to explain to them your situation.

The accumulation of these bad experiences resulted in Mary's decision to leave CalWORKs altogether.

How is Mary making it without welfare?

I got my apartment through disability. Thank God. I only pay about \$120 rent. It's a one-bedroom apartment. They help me with the rest. It's a very good neighborhood. The

apartment is spotless. They always keep it up-to-date. (She qualified as disabled for her apartment, but did not qualify for state disability.)

I'm still working for the same security company. The problem is—I work events like the Rose Bowl. They don't have events everyday, so I don't work everyday. Right now, I'm struggling trying to look for a job. I'm looking and sending out resumes. I just want a full-time job, put my son in school, and get myself together. But with my disability, it's hard. I've tried to file for disability. I went through the whole process. They send me to their doctor. If I can hear out of my right, I guess I'm okay. That's what they say. I guess I have to be completely deaf for them to help me out. I've taken clerical, I did banking and credit. So it's not like I don't have any skills. Some jobs I can't do because of my hearing. I can answer phones and do some things, but I'm limited because I can't hear. I can only do one thing at a time that involves hearing than doing multiple things at one time.

In sum, after weighing their priorities against their problems with GAIN and CalWORKs, the majority of those in the leaver focus group came to the conclusion that the program was not working for them, and they just might make it without the benefits and pressures of GAIN. Cara left while compliant because she thought that the program thwarted her attempts to have an artistic career. Alicia was also compliant, but she had multiple complaints. Not getting aid for child care was just the “last straw.” Tracy left CalWORKs under a sanction because she was having trouble complying with both GAIN and CalWORKs requirements. Mary also left under a sanction because of multiple complaints. Blanca, a single mother with a young child, left CalWORKs because she was having problems with child care and transportation and was offered a refuge to live with her mother in another county. Their decisions emerged from an accumulation of discontents and feelings about the program and from the belief that they could make it on their own. However, leaving was not necessarily the result of a rational calculus of problems and benefits. In the case of Patricia, she had serious mental and physical problems and could not cope with GAIN, and ended up in disability.

#### **4) Summary and Conclusions**

- I. With a much smaller population of parents, the focus group component of this study came up with some of the same findings of the Participant Survey reported in Chapter 3 regarding barriers to compliance, and these are noted below. While focus group findings cannot be generalized to a larger population, they nevertheless compliment the Participant Survey by putting a human face on the statistics -- a concrete sense of how personal and program barriers to compliance with GAIN are experienced, understood, and expressed in the words of participants. Underlying their words was a recurring theme: noncompliance with GAIN requirements can often be a result of a clash between their life situations -- their needs and priorities -- and the requirements and administration of the GAIN welfare-to-work program. From the perspectives of parents, GAIN can be both an avenue to independence and an impediment to achieving it.
- II. The four focus groups also put a human face on some troubling noncompliance patterns identified by County administrative records from LEADER and GEARS. One focus group targeted parents from a group with relatively high sanction

rates—participants with first sanctions or who were sanctioned for not attending Orientation or Job Club. The second group consisted of parents who were currently experiencing long sanctions. The third focus group consisted of parents who have been “cured” for about a year after a history of multiple or long first sanctions. The fourth group, addressing the high rate of leavers among parents with a history of sanctions, recruited parents who had left CalWORKs while compliant or while sanctioned. In each case, their personal life situations and experiences with welfare lead to sanctions or to leaving GAIN and CalWORKs altogether.

What differences and similarities did these four groups have in terms of reported barriers to compliance? A major finding was that participants across the groups shared many of the same kinds of personal and program barriers to participation, and, as stated above, members of all groups talked about how their life situations, their needs and priorities sometimes conflicted with GAIN requirements.

Nevertheless, variations and patterned differences appeared between the four focus groups. While the following findings cannot be generalized to larger populations, they are suggestive of patterns among parents with similar sanction and leaving histories.

- Like survey respondents, short-term, first sanctioned participants cited a commitment to work as one of the most significant reasons for their failure to participate in GAIN. Focus group findings reveal that the majority (four of the six) of these short-term sanctioned participants did not complete Orientation or Job Club because they preferred work over participation in the program. They identify as workers, not welfare recipients, and do not participate in GAIN as long as they are working. But able to find only low-paying, part-time jobs, these participants chose to piece together income from work and their children’s cash aid as part of an overall strategy for supporting their families. They fall back on GAIN when work proves to be unstable or their incomes from working are insufficient, and they need their adult portion of the cash aid to support their families. This means that they may participate in GAIN when they cannot find a job, when a job ends, or in an off-season in the case of seasonal work. Additionally, three of these participants said they avoided GAIN as long as they had work or other means of support because of bureaucratic “hassles” or the stigma of welfare.
- All but one of those in the focus group with parents who had experienced long-term sanctions were also experiencing their first sanctions because they had failed to complete Orientation or Job Club. Similar to about a third of those in the Participant Survey, each of the participants in the focus group with long-term sanctions took a sanction and lost their portion of cash aid because of what they felt to be overwhelming caretaking

responsibilities for members of their families. They either had disabled children, caretaking responsibilities in a time of family crisis, needs to protect children in dangerous neighborhoods, or fears about leaving their very young children with strangers.

- What parents who had been cured for about a year after varied histories of multiple or medium to long first sanctions had in common was their situation as working poor Spanish-speaking immigrants with a relatively long dependence on GAIN and CalWORKs. The two men in the group of seven were married and sanctioned when they did not bother to report their required hours of work. One man had been sanctioned for over two years because of this breakdown in communication with GAIN. Like the parents in the group with short or long-term first sanctions, they initially had preferred work over participation in the program and thought of themselves as workers rather than welfare recipients. The six women in the group were all single and had suffered many personal problems that affected their ability to comply, such as domestic abuse, health problems, high levels of stress, child care problems, and, in one case, illiteracy. These problems were exacerbated by communication issues: not receiving notices in Spanish, misinformation and misunderstandings, fear or inability to successfully contest sanctions they thought unjust, and feeling that they were not treated with respect. Nevertheless, these parents stayed with GAIN because they needed it and had no alternatives. Their tenacity was expressed by the most vulnerable person in the group, an illiterate single mother who said, "I came to this country to get ahead. I have to come out ahead."
- The leavers had histories of short to long first sanctions or multiple sanctions. They shared many of the same personal barriers to compliance mentioned in other groups, although none as serious as those of the Spanish-speaking women who were struggling to comply after a history of sanctions. The leavers were more likely than first, long-sanctioned, and long-term cured participants to be veterans of GAIN. They used their knowledge of the system to fight for what they wanted. When they did not succeed, they concluded that the program just did not fit their needs. This was particularly the case of the women who left while compliant. While voicing this view, the women who were sanctioned when they left probably wanted to avoid the stress of curing yet another sanction. Both sanctioned and non-sanctioned leavers left with the hope of surviving on their own. The exception was a woman who ended up on disability and worse off than before. She came to the focus group looking for help.

III. Both the survey and focus groups findings indicate that many sanctions may be related to communication problems, such as lack of notification and knowledge about the program and inconsistent guidance for accessing knowledge about requirements and services. Some of these problems, like proper notification, are

related to computer glitches and technical issues. Others are related to inadequate communication between GSWs and EWs and between these case workers and participants. Many parents complained about the difficulty of contacting GSWs and their frequent turnover. However, parents tended to have more complaints about EWs than the more accessible GSWs. Although this report is only about GAIN, it is important to note that participants' views of GAIN are often colored by their relations with CalWORKs as a whole, since both are part of their experience with welfare practices. Underlying participant complaints about communication problems was often the view that the case workers who enforce rules do not necessarily understand their life situations.

In the first sanction study, some parents expressed the view that close communication and guidance from caseworkers were more important than sanctions in assuring compliance. Likewise some GSWs preferred to rely on "giving chances" to noncompliant parents rather than strictly enforcing sanction rules. Ironically, in this report, the leavers most clearly articulated the importance of case workers who understood their particulars situations and helped them get ahead. However, leavers argued that even their good caseworkers were limited by inflexible rules, and this was a major reason for leaving.

- IV. Focus groups findings suggest that although participants shared the same problems of poverty, the variety and complexity of their backgrounds and needs could not always be served by the standardized requirements of the program. From the participants' points of view, the inflexibility of requirements limits how they can participate, what they can receive, and what caseworkers can do to help them in their quest for independence. This lack of fit between needs and requirements was mentioned across the board and was sometimes central to their decisions to take sanctions or leave the program altogether.

## **5) Participant Recommendations for Encouraging Compliance and Reducing Sanctions**

The following recommendations reflect findings from eight focus groups: four from the March 2005 sanction report and from the four focus groups detailed in this report. Many of these findings are shared by the Participant Survey. The quotes are based on qualitative, not quantitative, data and are intended only to give examples of how participants expressed these recommendations from their own experiences and in their own words. Their statements were made after a discussion of barriers to compliance, when participants were asked to make recommendations about how to decrease sanctions and to increase compliance with GAIN requirements. Their answers are also suggested in the discussion of barriers to compliance.

To avoid sanctions, participants most often asked for more frequent and personal communication between themselves and their GSWs (and between their GSWs, EWs, and child care providers) and more fully explained information about GAIN regulations



and sanctions. Also, participants argued that early and more prompt delivery and payment for safe child care would increase their compliance with GAIN. Given communication and rescheduling problems, some participants strongly advised each other to redouble their efforts in order to avoid the consequences of missed appointments.

## **1. Make certain that participants understand GAIN requirements from the beginning of their involvement in GAIN.**

Participant: Just like you guys, right now [in the focus group], when you guys made us fill out [the consent form]...you went through it with us. You let us know what this was about. I think they should be like that. They should actually go through with us and let us know what we are filling out and what it's about.

Facilitator: You don't remember having the conversations specifically when they said this is called your Welfare to Work Plan?

Participant: No. They just say, "Sign here, sign here."

Participant: I mean, I've seen the paper...I know that we are supposed to read it, too, to know what we are signing, but maybe it would bring to more attention if they would let us know, "I'm going to go through this with you and let you know what you are signing...But they don't do that. [They say], "Just sign here." So you just sign.

Participant: Basically, you trust them what they are saying, and you just sign it and return the papers back.

Participant: Well yes, if he would explain everything to me, it would have been okay with me. Me having to participate, I understand that we are getting money so we have to do something for ourselves... My worker, he's actually the main person that's supposed to be letting us know what is going on, and what we can do. He didn't let me know anything.

Participant: I mean, because I understand, sometimes I do get mad and I get frustrated, but then I'm like, "Okay, they are helping us out, and we have to do what they are asking us to do, but if they would explain it to us from the beginning." Like when you come, and when you first apply, they should let you know, "Just don't come and think that you are going to be coming and getting money," they should let you know that you are going to have to participate in GAIN or explain, "Okay, right now you are pregnant, you will be excused. But until your son turns a certain age, then you are going to have to attend it. It's not if you want to." They should just be more specific... A lot of people come here thinking it's easy, that I'm just going to come and get money. That's not how it works. You actually have to do something in order for you to receive something.

## **2. Provide participants information about Specialized Supportive Services.**

Participant: The only thing that I could think of is that they need to maybe interview people before they start Job Club to see if they have any issues like that would help them to not participate. The only thing that I said that when I went they just said, "You are going to have to do this, or you are going to get cut." They didn't tell me anything about mental health or domestic violence and things like that they maybe should do before, or if you have problems with a small baby, or...

Participant: Yes but it wasn't until I got sanctioned about three times before I found out, and then come to find out, my problem was I wasn't mentally fit, depressed. I didn't know anything about that, and that was about maybe four years after I had started messing with the GAIN. I was really surprised about that, and then when I started getting my therapy for about two years that I was doing that, and they didn't bother me so I can't say they were trying to push me because they were very good with me.

### **3. Provide participants with consistently accurate information.**

Participant: Every worker tells you something different. She was just telling me that they told her she was not able to attend school right after she finished Job Club. She has to get a job... So she is not able to attend school. I don't know why they told her that.

### **4. Provide participants ongoing support and communication about requirements.**

Participant: It's just so many things that you have to deal with. I understand that they are helping you out and giving you the money. They are doing you a favor, but it would just be better if they were able to explain. It just seems so easy, but then, as you are going along, things start getting more complicated. There are letters that are being sent to you that you are not aware of what they are. If everything was to be explained, it would be better...

Participant: You guys only send it when something is changing...They should send papers like that just to let us know how we feel, if we have any comments or anything, or if we would like to talk to them about any certain things, but they just mail us things whenever it's something bad, or I guess we need to come for something.

Participant: Be able to talk to them so they can understand what we go through, to understand us.

### **5. Provide more flexibility in meeting requirements.**

Participant: Cause normally people work...if they working six hours a day, and that's a part time job, no matter how you add it up at the end of the week, it's going to be 30 hours even if you're going cashiering, you know. They can't give me any more hours because school lets out, you know...

Participant: Then my thing is here I am trying to do the right thing, getting sanctioned, getting sanctioned, but, I mean, maybe if they can just go ahead and change the hours some for the ones that want to come down, who's going to be exempt. I don't have a problem going down there [to] sit for the class to do it, but just shorten it. If they can just shorten the time because I never know what's going to happen with my son with him being sickly like that. I don't know.

Participant: I guess like give people more options to do things like they just said, "If you don't do this, okay, it's done, you're cut." I mean, they know people are out here struggling, tryin', they need to give people a little more, you know, a couple more options of doing things.

## **6. Build trusting, less bureaucratic relationships with participants.**

Participant: Like she was saying, they could try to think more of other people problems that they are going through, and see if they could work or something, and see if they could do better instead of just mail some letters, and then they just cut your check off or you money off. They need to do a little bit better than that like they are demanding you to come to work, and if you can't make it like when they want you to come, then they will just cut your check off or something like that. They should try to be or patient with people.

## **7. Listen to and understand participants' situations.**

Participant: Just ask them to try to just actually listen to what their clients have to tell them because sometime the clients really want to do it, but there is something holdin' them where they really can't do it, you know, everybody's not a deadbeat. Lot of people really want to do things, and there's a reason why they really can't do it. And just try to listen, and try to make a program where we can least try to get half way with the clients if we can't give `em out full, just give `em something to have a leeway to be able to do what they want to do.

## **8. Facilitate supportive relationships among participants.**

Participant: Maybe having a meeting for people that work related to helping us improve job skills. The parents who do have jobs, have a little meeting certain days, all get together to talk about how our job is doing, and talk about how GAIN has helped or how welfare has helped or, you know, or even if you weren't able to provide help with child care or money wise. Because sometimes if you work, you might work so many hours that you feel like you just can't make it sometimes.

## **9. Improve telephone communication between GSWs and participants.**

Facilitator: What would you recommend that GAIN do to make it easier for you to stay in GAIN and to avoid sanctions?

Participant: More phone hours.

Participant: A hotline.

Facilitator: How would the hotline be set up? What kind of information would it provide? Would you leave messages, or would you wanting to be getting information from the hotline?

Participant: Directly through the worker.

Facilitator: So she could leave messages?

Participant: Yes.

Facilitator: You can leave messages now, can't you?

Participant: Yes, but they won't get back at you.

Participant: They are not allowed to call back. That's what it is. You leave your name and number and whatever your problem is, but then you call again, and they are like, "Well,

they can't call you back." I don't know why they are not allowed to return your phone calls.

Participant: They don't communicate with their clients.

Participant: GAIN workers usually don't have a time like for them to be on the phone...So, I mean, just at least when they send you a letter, if they are giving you the phone number, for them to be able to get in contact with you or for you to be able to get in contact with them.

Participant: I know there are a lot of people that they deal with, but we should at least be able to talk to them when there are problems like that. They have to understand what we have to go through. It's their job. They should at least try to help us more than...because we have to be calling them and calling them. What I'm going through is a lot, so. That's kind of hard. I've been calling for like a month, two months already, and they still don't return my calls.

(Researchers note that participants may be misinformed about how the message system works and sometimes confuse calls to GSWs and EWs. Nevertheless, many think that the phone systems do not work for them.)

**10. Avoid changing GSWs to provide greater consistency for participants. When changes must be made, communicate them to participants.**

Participant: Once you get to know your worker, they change them, and they don't know what is going on. New workers don't know your history and cause problems.

Participant: We don't learn we have a new worker until we try to contact them and are told that person isn't the worker anymore.

(Researchers note that when a new worker is assigned to a participant the GAIN computer system automatically sends a notice to the participant informing her/him of the change. However, addresses change and participants do not always carefully read notices.)

**11. Institute better communication between EWs and GSWs. Streamline the communication process between CalWORKs and GAIN for participants.**

Participant: It's confusing because you have an Eligibility Worker, and then you have a GAIN worker, and they really don't [communicate]...it's like what you have with your Eligibility Worker; it's not the same over here (GAIN). Like if I have a problem with her, this is a problem with her, it's not with him. I have to call her.

**12. Provide warnings prior to Notices of Action that allow participants the opportunity to remedy problems before threatening them with sanctions. Provide more time and chances to comply.**

Participant: Maybe, at least if they would communicate with you, let you know what's going on before they send you a letter telling you that you are not going to be receiving aid anymore. Or at least in the letter, they should let you know why instead of saying, "Call us." If it's because of your mistake, then you could be able to figure that out. I should go and fix it.

Participant: They don't know. They are not in our shoes. They don't know what we go through without money. They don't know where we are going to stay, are we going to eat, are our kids going to eat. They don't know that. They just go ahead and do what they have to do. But they should call and then send a letter and explain what it (Notice of Action) means. They should do that.

Participant: A way to avoid sanctions? In all fairness, people should get a warning, three strikes or something. It's too black or white, no medium ground. Give people three opportunities to take care of the problem...to give mothers a chance — maybe they had an exam at school or had to work late, or the kids had a conference at school. They get overwhelmed and they overlook it.

Give more time to reply to notice of non-compliance in case there are problems with the mail or, as in [name of participant] case, she was in the hospital.

### **13. Correct problems that cause delays in delivery of Notices of Action and provide more detailed information about the reason for the sanction.**

Participant: At least send a letter letting you know why before they cut you off. They did it to me, and they did it to my friend. They send a letter after they cut her benefits. They should send it first, and then give them some time. I don't know. But they don't do that. They don't even call or send you a letter [to explain] why they are doing to do to you...

Participant: They are not specific. They don't explain.

Participant: It just says, "You have been sanctioned."

Participant: It actually says, "As of the following month, they are going to cut your aid down."

Participant: But they don't explain why.

Participant: I never received nothing at all.

Facilitator: You don't even know what these letters are?

Participant: No, because I never received them. For like three months, no letters.

(Researchers note that Notices of Action, in fact, check off the cause of the sanction from a list of noncompliant actions. However, the exact cause is not detailed. In any case, some participants panic and are very upset when they receive these notices and do not fully understand them and the compliance process involved.)

### **14. Reduce delays in providing child care and transportation support.**

Participant: I think that they should...when it comes down to the transportation, when it comes down to the child care, those should be things that are concrete, taken care of like he was saying the sitter and being able to afford and finding the right person to leave your child in their care. Just because we are participants and we are considered at the low, whatever, doesn't mean that we want to throw our kids at anybody. These are our children...Another thing is just making sure these things are set up, the transportation, the child care, that the child care provider has the money. I think someone said upfront, before we even start.

Participant: It's an issue because of the simple fact the time...upon the time that you receive the letter, you then have to go out and find somebody to watch your child with no money. So then you want us to just throw our kids at somebody. Like I said, I'm a concerned parent also. So I just don't want to leave my kids in the care of anybody. So if we have the security knowing that these matters are taken care of before you get to this point, I will guarantee you, you will not have as many people sanctioned...

Participant: Like she was saying, it could be better because you want to get up and go. When you get up in the morning, you want to go do something to better yourself. GAIN is a good thing, but at the same time, it's not. You have to wait three months. You have to get the benefits. Who is going to watch our child for three months? Or the money that you are getting you are going to have to try to squeeze a little something to give the baby sitter until the money comes.

**15. Increase communication between GSWs and child care providers.**

Participant: Child care is separate from GAIN when it should be one because we're participating in the GAIN, and in order to participate, we need our children taken care of. Yet they want that to be something separate like that's not their thing. When it should be their main priority... They are making it two different programs, and it's harder. That's where I find it being hard for me. I mean, not only stress for everyday life, but as far as trying to deal with your GAIN worker and then trying to deal with another worker for child care.

**16. Make the program more attractive by stressing training for good jobs that will get participants out of welfare altogether.**

Participant: I think they should change the Job Club, job search, however they want to label it, because, basically, they just want you to get any job out there, and it's a job, it's not a career. I think they should basically send the people to school because I think more than half either got pregnant before finishing school in the first place. So they should help you as far as get either your GED or your equivalent first, and then, set you up with schooling. Of course, short term, anything under two years is practical to get some kind of good education so that when you do go out, you can get a job that is going to be a career not a job temporarily. Basically, that's kind of what they want right now. They want you to get just any job out there and, of course, that can last a few months, and then you are right back in their system again.

**17. Show participants greater respect.**

Participant: When you come into their office, you are already scheduled as a participant, a nobody. If you treat me like I want to be treated as a human being, maybe you can get [name of participant] to come out and do what they need to do, to let them know that, "Okay, I'm going to give you this money, but I want you to do this for me and for yourself basically."

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **Conclusions and Policy Implications**

This report focuses on the composition of the sanctioned Welfare-to-Work population in the County of Los Angeles, as well as on the factors leading to repeated compliance problems and chronic sanctions. The findings presented in this report suggest that the recent rise in the County's sanctions rate is largely the result of the increasing prominence within the sanctioned population of chronically sanctioned participants.

The results from the participant survey indicate that a significant proportion of welfare parents were either unaware that they had been sanctioned at all or were unaware as to why they were sanctioned. In addition, the survey findings suggest that the income of participants was not high enough to afford the hardship of sanctions for the family and that the family income of chronically sanctioned participants decreased by 20 percent when they were sanctioned. Results from survey data and regression models conclusively demonstrate that both person-level and program-level barriers are important determinants affecting the likelihood of becoming chronically sanctioned.

Sanctions were designed by the architects of welfare reform as a deterrent to noncompliance with program requirements. In theory, the imposition of a financial sanction should persuade participants to comply with work requirements. However, the findings presented here suggest that the sanctioned population has become divided into two sub-groups: (i) Participants who cure their sanctions quickly and for whom sanctions have a deterrent effect; (ii) participants who are sanctioned more than once and/or remain sanctioned for protracted periods of time, and for whom sanctions do not work as designed. Results from the survey data, regression models and focus groups indicate that the latter group, which this report has referred to as 'chronically sanctioned participants', face substantial personal and program-level barriers, and their immediate family needs and personal problems take priority over complying with work requirements. Moreover, the imposition of sanctions on these participants creates greater hardship levels and places an additional burden on their families, thus making the return to compliance more difficult.

While this report primarily deals with the issue of sanctions at the county level, some of the policy recommendations presented below offer potential measures that could only be implemented at the state or federal levels. For this reason, state and federal policymakers may also wish to give these recommendations careful consideration. The recommendations are especially important in the context of statutory changes enacted in the TANF reauthorization program through the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 and can be used to inform efforts to develop strategies and solutions to reduce the number financial sanctions and to boost participation in the CalWORKs program.

## **Policy Recommendations**

**Implement interventions aimed at preventing participants from incurring repeat sanctions and/or preventing them from remaining sanctioned for long periods of time.**

The recent increase in monthly sanction rates is related to the growing number of participants who become chronically sanctioned. DPSS should develop strategies to decrease both the frequency and the length of financial sanctions. For example, intensive outreach efforts might be put in place to engage participants sanctioned for more than six months and/or participants who become sanctioned for a second time (or who are likely to be sanctioned for a second time). The findings from this study indicate that the average number of months participants were sanctioned between the beginning of 2004 and the beginning of 2006 increased from 11 months to 16 months, indicating that sanctioned participants are remaining in sanctioned status for longer periods of time.

**Closely monitor the impact of the strategies implemented as a result of the Sanctions Action Plan to ensure that the new policies continue to produce positive results.**

Administrative data for the second half of 2005 shows a sharp decline in the rate of noncompliance and conversely an increase in the number of participants complying with Welfare-to-Work program components. Additional positive trends also include a decrease in the number of participants who become sanctioned after being noncompliant. As the Epilogue to this report specifies, the sanction rate and the number of sanctioned participants has declined throughout 2006. As of the end of August 2006, the sanction rate dropped to 28 percent, and the number of sanctioned participants dropped by 15 percent to approximately 17,000. The Department should continue to monitor the implementation of its Action Plan to reduce CalWORKs Welfare-to-Work sanctions and ensure that these trends continue.

**Implement policy changes based on incentives to encourage a return to compliance among sanctioned participants and noncompliant participants at risk of becoming sanctioned.**

A salient trend identified in this report is the increase in the number of CalWORKs participants who become chronically sanctioned. This means that the underlying assumption guiding the imposition of financial sanctions—namely, that they encourage participants to comply with GAIN requirements - is not playing out as intended for this chronically sanctioned group, which is a growing segment of the sanctioned population. Exploring the possibility of offering incentives to sanctioned participants has the potential to promote reengagement with Welfare-to-Work requirements. DPSS should be encouraged to explore the implementation of new policies that could work in a combined manner with the current structure of financial penalties to provide incentives and motivate participants to comply with program requirements. For example, a bonus



to chronically sanctioned participants who are able to cure their sanctions may motivate participants and increase work participation rates. However, providing a bonus to chronically sanctioned participants who are able to cure their sanctions as motivation would require a State law change.

**Take measures to ensure participants understand Welfare-to-Work requirements from the beginning of their involvement in GAIN. Moreover, ensure that noncompliant participants facing more than one sanction receive a timely Notice of Action, and ensure that they are made aware of their sanction and of the specific reason for the imposition of the financial penalty.**

A continuous effort to ensure that participants understand their work requirements will likely decrease the risk of becoming sanctioned. Almost half of the sanctioned survey respondents indicated they did not receive a Notice of Action regarding their noncompliance. Survey results indicate that 40 percent of the chronically sanctioned participants did not know why they were sanctioned. Multivariate results indicated not only that participants are more likely to return to compliance quickly if they are knowledgeable about sanction rules, but also that a close predictive relationship exists between unawareness of compliance rules and chronic sanctions. Analysis of participant survey data suggests that significant proportions of sanctioned participants remain unaware they had been sanctioned even though they were initially fairly well informed of the sanctions policies.

**Consider the development and implementation of outreach programs that would target chronically sanctioned participants who entered CalWORKs before 1998. It is likely that these long-term participants need special services to expedite their transition from the welfare system.**

There are almost 8,000 participants who entered the CalWORKs program before the implementation of welfare reform in 1998, and who by December 2005 (seven years after the implementation of welfare reform) were sanctioned. Rather than finding employment and exiting welfare, this group continues to struggle with the Welfare-to-Work requirements while staying in welfare. The continued presence of these persons in the CalWORKs program is one of the reasons the sanctions rate remains high.

**Consider the use of performance incentives to reward GSWs who are able to engage noncompliant and sanctioned cases.**

The Reauthorization of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program Interim Final Rule issued on June 29, 2006 by the Department of Health and Human Services implemented changes enacted in the reauthorization of the TANF program in the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 (PL 109-71). These regulations now add sanctioned participants who receive cash aid on behalf of their children to the work participation rates. A performance incentive may help to mitigate the impact of including sanctioned cases as part of the work participation rate.

**Consider implementing an outreach program to re-engage participants who are in a penalty period due to multiple and long-term sanctions.**

The Human Services Trailer Bill (AB 1808) approved by the Governor on July 12, 2006 made some important statutory changes regarding CalWORKs Welfare-to-Work sanctions. Under prior law, the length of time of a financial sanction was based on the number of times a sanction had been imposed on a participant. AB 1808 has now eliminated this penalty waiting period and allows the termination of a sanction at anytime if the sanctioned participant performs the activity for which the sanction was imposed. Participants who are currently in a penalty period are most likely unaware that they can now return to compliance without having to wait either three or six months before curing their sanctions. An outreach for these sanctioned participants will be an effective way of re-engaging multiple and long-term sanctioned participants.

**Explore taking additional measures to expand and intensify efforts in identifying and engaging chronically sanctioned participants with Specialized Supportive Services needs.**

The results presented in this report indicate that participants who use Specialized Supportive Services are less likely to become chronically sanctioned. It is therefore imperative to identify participants who have unmet needs for domestic violence, substance abuse and mental health services so that they may receive treatment that will help prevent the risk of becoming sanctioned. Both the survey and administrative data indicated that chronically sanctioned participants used Specialized Supportive Services much less frequently than either never-sanctioned participants or short-term sanction participants. The findings from the multivariate analysis indicate that the odds of becoming chronically sanctioned are cut in half when participants receive specialized supportive services. However, any measures designed to increase participant engagement in specialized supportive services, must be implemented in a way that protects participant confidentiality.

**Establish appropriate measures to ensure that the communication between CalWORKs participants and GSWs is improved.**

The participant survey data show that the Department is effective in providing participants with written communication and that participants are able to understand the content of the information. Nevertheless, all categories of participants noted difficulties in contacting their GSWs. Results from the regression models also indicate that chronically sanctioned participants are 20 percent more likely than never sanctioned participants to have difficulties reaching their GSWs. Many participants speaking in the focus groups complained about the difficulties involved in contacting GSWs and of frequent GSW turnover.

**Identify CalWORKs participants who are unable to participate in Welfare-to-Work requirements because they lack access to child care, or transportation, and target these participants to ensure that they have the necessary information to access these services.**

Results from this study indicate that chronically sanctioned participants experienced significant barriers in accessing child care and transportation services. Approximately 35 percent of the survey respondents reported having transportation problems. Results from the regression models indicate, not only the need for these services, but also that gaps in the provision of supportive services strongly contribute to the risk of becoming chronically sanctioned. Steps should be taken to identify the stages of the Welfare-to-Work program where chronically sanctioned participants tend to become sanctioned due to a lack of access to supportive services.

**DPSS should prioritize training in the employment plans of participants with multiple personal barriers to compliance.**

The findings from this study strongly suggest that chronically sanctioned participants in County of Los Angeles fail to comply with work requirements because they face multiple barriers to compliance. The results presented in this study demonstrate, in particular, that these participants face significant personal barriers relative to never-sanctioned participants. These barriers greatly increase the risk of becoming sanctioned for extended periods of time. Results from the multivariate models indicate that the lack of a High School degree and poor work experience both strongly contributed to the likelihood of becoming chronically sanctioned. One way to provide additional support and assistance to participants struggling with ongoing personal barriers to compliance would be to prioritize training components in the employment plans of these participants so that they can receive additional help with issues such as learning disabilities, language barriers and deficiencies in basic skills.

**Expand the strategies and strategic solutions contained in the DPSS Action Plan to reduce Welfare-to-Work Sanctions by incorporating action items based in the findings contained in this report.**

The Action Plan to reduce CalWORKs Welfare-to-Work sanctions submitted to the Board on August 18, 2005 was developed based on the first sanction report prepared by the CAO for DPSS in 2005. An expansion of the measures contained in the Action Plan, including the incorporation of new action items based on the findings presented in the present report, will likely reduce the rate of sanctions for chronically sanctioned participants.

## **Next Steps**

The results and findings from this study suggest that increasingly proactive and preventive efforts should be made to provide needed case management and support services to vulnerable participants before sanctions are imposed. Without the

development of a structure of support and incentives to remove impediments to program participation, the chronically sanctioned population is likely to increase in the foreseeable future. The recent efforts DPSS has made, via the sanctions Action Plan and GAIN Sanctions Home Visit Outreach, represent important policy changes aimed at decreasing CalWORKs Welfare-to-Work sanctions. The development of an enhanced Action Plan based on the findings and recommendations made in this report will help to mitigate the adverse impact of new changes in TANF law that require states to include sanctioned participants in the calculation of work participation rates.

The findings presented in this study will additionally be used as points of departure for a planned study of the consequences of chronic sanctions. Issues to be addressed will include the impact chronic sanctions have on CalWORKs family grants, incomes, and access to services, including child care and transportation. RES and DPSS plan to conduct this study in 2007.

## EPILOGUE

In the time since RES first conducted the research for this report, the sanction rate in the County of Los Angeles dropped from almost 30 percent in December 2005 to 28 percent in August 2006. Moreover, the absolute number of sanctioned Welfare-to-Work participants in the County declined by 15 percent over this period, from 20,000 to 17,000, while enrollment only dropped by 8 percent. These more recent trends are especially significant and encouraging because the sanction rate had previously been increasing on a virtually continuous basis since the State of California implemented welfare reform in 1998. DPSS is to be commended for convening the Sanctions Work Group in response to the release of RES' first sanctions report, and for taking steps that have enhanced the capacity participants have to comply with Welfare-to-Work requirements.

While the County's sanction rate has improved in general, it is important to note that the underlying dynamics identified in the main body of this report remain more or less unchanged. Only roughly 10 percent of the sanctions imposed in August 2006, for example, were imposed on participants sanctioned for the first time. At the same time, while the rate of growth in multiple sanctions continued to decline, 52 percent of the participants who became sanctioned in August 2006 had already been sanctioned previously at least once. The remaining 38 percent were participants in their first sanction instance, but they had received this sanction prior to August 2006.

Further consistency with the main analysis presented in this report is observed in the proportion of sanctioned participants who remained sanctioned for six months or more, which increased to 70 percent by August 2006. Closely connected to this, the average sanction duration increased to almost 18 months by August 2006, suggesting that sanctioned participants are tending to remain sanctioned for increasing intervals of time.

Therefore, while the overall sanction rates have improved, participants sanctioned multiple times and/or for relatively long periods of time have continued to present a challenge to DPSS. In fact, amid the general decline in the County's sanction rate, the proportion of sanctioned participants RES categorizes as 'chronically sanctioned' participants has increased from 83 percent at the end of the study period presented in the main body of this report to 86 percent by August 2006. The remaining 14 percent were participants in their first sanction instance, but they had been sanctioned for less than six months.

## APPENDIX A

**Table A.1 Participant Survey for Sanctions**

All Participants			
Survey Questions	Sanction Status (%)		
	Never N = 561	Short Term N=295	Chronic N=649
Survey Language			
English	82.9	85.4	87.5
Spanish	17.1	14.6	12.5
Q. What is your current living arrangement? Do you live in your own house, or apartment, at someone else's house, or in another type of dwelling?			
1. LIVE IN A HOUSE	22.3	24.4	26.7
2. LIVE IN AN APARTMENT	41.9	35.6	33.1
3. SOMEONE'S APARTMENT/HOUSE INCLUDING FAMILY, FRIENDS/ACQUAINTANCES	33.2	38.0	38.1
4. ROOM IN A HOTEL/MOTEL, ROOMING/BOARDINGHOUSE	0.2		0.3
5. HOMELESS SHELTER	0.2		0.2
6. OTHER TYPE OF SHELTER (SUCH AS SHELTER FOR BATTERED WOMEN/RUNAWAYS)	0.5	1.0	0.3
7. OTHER (SPECIFY)	1.8	1.0	1.2
77. DON'T KNOW/			0.2
99. REFUSED			

All Participants			
Survey Questions	Sanction Status (%)		
	Never	Short Term	Chronic
<p>Q. In the past 12 months did you live in any of the following places [SELECT ALL THAT APPLY]</p> <p>a. a house 37.8 42.0 46.1</p> <p>b. an apartment 44.6 39.3 35.1</p> <p>c. someone's apartment/house including family, friends/acquaintances 30.7 34.6 33.6</p> <p>d. a room in a hotel, motel, rooming or boardinghouse 2.7 5.8 4.6</p> <p>e. a homeless shelter 1.8 1.4 0.8</p> <p>f. another type of shelter (such as shelter for battered women) 0.7 0.7 0.5</p> <p>g. a group home or residence, such as residential treatment center or halfway house 0.2 1.0 0.3</p> <p>h. any other place (Specify) 0.7 1.4 0.8</p> <p>_____</p> <p>1. YES</p> <p>2. NO</p> <p>7. DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE</p> <p>9. REFUSED</p>			
<p>Q. Currently how many adults 18 years of age or older live in your household, including yourself?</p> <p>_____ NUMBER OF ADULTS</p> <p>77. DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE</p> <p>99. REFUSED</p>	<p>Mean</p> <p>2.2</p>	<p>Mean</p> <p>2.4</p>	<p>Mean</p> <p>2.5</p>
<p>Q. Currently how many children under 18 live in your household?</p> <p>_____ NUMBER OF CHILDREN</p> <p>0. NONE [PROBE]</p> <p>77. DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE</p> <p>99. REFUSED</p>	<p>Mean</p> <p>2.1</p>	<p>Mean</p> <p>2.1</p>	<p>Mean</p> <p>2.4</p>

All Participants			
Survey Questions	Sanction Status (%)		
	Never	Short Term	Chronic
Q. What is the age of your (FIRST, SECOND, THIRD...) child?  — AGE OF FIRST CHILD — AGE OF SECOND CHILD — AGE OF THIRD CHILD — AGE OF FOURTH CHILD 77. DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE 99. REFUSED	Mean   8.0 6.8 6.3  6.4	Mean   7.6 6.8 6.2  5.0	Mean   8.2 7.1 6.7  5.6
Q. When did you first begin receiving aid from the CalWORKs program or when did you first register in the CalWORKs program?  <u>mm/yyyy</u> 77/7777 DON'T KNOW /NO RESPONSE 99/9999 REFUSED	2002 – 2004*  * The majority of participants	2002 – 2004**  ** The majority of participants	2002 – 2004***  *** The majority of participants
Q. In the past month, how many adult household members have received financial aid or cash grant from the CalWORKs program?  — NUMBER OF ADULTS 77. DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE 99. REFUSED	Mean   0.9	Mean   0.9	Mean   0.8
Q. And in the past month, how many children in your household members have received financial aid or cash grant from the CalWORKs program?			



All Participants			
Survey Questions	Sanction Status (%)		
	Never	Short Term	Chronic
[IF Q10b = 0, SKIPTO Q13]  NUMBER OF CHILDREN 77. DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE 99. REFUSED	Mean  1.8	Mean  1.7	Mean  1.9
Q. In the month you first began receiving aid from the CalWORKs program, how much cash assistance did you receive for yourself and your family members?  \$ _____ 7777. DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE 9999. REFUSED	Median  \$548	Median  \$548	Median  \$550
Q. In the past month, how much cash assistance did you and your family members receive from the CalWORKs program?  \$ _____ 7777. DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE 9999. REFUSED	Median  \$554.50	Median  \$557.50	Median  \$550
Q. Since you began receiving aid, has the amount of your cash assistance changed?  1. YES 2. NO 7. DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE 9. REFUSED	72.2 25.3 2.3 0.2	66.4 32.2 1.0 0.3	70.1 27.3 2.3 0.3

All Participants			
Survey Questions	Sanction Status (%)		
	Never	Short Term	Chronic
Q. In which month and year did the amount of your cash assistance last change?  ____/____ MONTH/YEAR 77/7777 DON'T KNOW /NO RESPONSE 99/9999 REFUSED	2004 – 2005 *  * The majority of responses.	2004 – 2005 *  * The majority of responses.	2004 – 2005 *  * The majority of responses.
Q. Did the amount of your cash assistance:  1. Increase, or 2. Decrease? 7. DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE 9. REFUSED	38.8 57.8 3.2 0.3	39.3 59.7 1.0	22.2 74.7 3.1
Q. By how much did it [INCREASE/DECREASE]?  \$____ AMOUNT OF CHANGE 7777. DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE 9999. REFUSED	Median  \$100	Median  \$200	Median  \$150
Q. What was the reason that the amount of your cash assistance changed since you began receiving cash aid from the CalWORKs program?  1. got married 2. had a child moved out of the household 3. had a child born in your household 4. had increased earnings or income 5. had a decline in earnings or income 6. had additional earnings from other household members 7. failed to meet a GAIN or	1.0 1.2 8.9 30.4 5.2 1.5 10.4	0.5 0 9.2 24.0 8.2 0.5 17.4	0.2 0.7 6.2 17.8 7.3 0.4 29.0

All Participants				
Survey Questions		Sanction Status (%)		
		Never	Short Term	Chronic
8.	Welfare-to-Work requirement had other CalWORKs sanctions that would result in grant reduction i.e., DA sanction, etc.	3.2	5.1	7.7
9.	had an eligible adult reach 60 month time limit	1.0	1.0	0.7
10.	lacked immunization documentation, or	0.5	2.0	1.8
11.	some other reason (SPECIFY)	21.7	21.4	21.5
77.	DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE			
99.	REFUSED			
Q.	Are you currently employed?			
1.	YES	42.1	36.6	26.7
2.	NO	57.9	63.4	73.2
7.	DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE			
9.	REFUSED			
Q.	How many months were you employed in the past 12 months?	Mean	Mean	Mean
—	NUMBER OF MONTHS			
0.	NONE	2.9	2.4	2.0
77.	DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE			
99.	REFUSED			
	[IF ANSWER = 12 SKIP TO Q18a]			
Q.	What is the hourly wage at your [primary] job?	Median	Median	Median
	\$__.	\$8.1	\$8.4	\$8.0
Q.	Have you looked for work in the past 12 months?			
1.	YES	51.5	53.6	64.4
2.	NO	48.3	45.8	35.3

All Participants				
Survey Questions		Sanction Status (%)		
		Never	Short Term	Chronic
7.	DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE	0.2	0.7	0.2
9.	REFUSED			0.2
Q.	Which of the following conditions did not allow you to work in the past 12 months? [IF EMPLOYED FOR LAST 12 MONTHS SKIPTO Q23] [CHECK ALL THAT APPLY]			
	1. Physical disability	16.8	15.7	14.0
	2. Mental Health Problems	7.6	4.4	3.4
	3. Substance Abuse Problems	0.7	0	0.8
	4. Domestic Violence Problems	2.4	0	1.7
	5. Transportation problems	14.0	19.7	22.0
	6. Child care Problems	30.8	33.6	40.4
	7. Attending school or training	30.1	27.5	20.1
	8. Looked for a job but could not find one	30.1	30.1	35.5
	9. Other (Specify)	14.7	19.2	13.5
Q.	For each of the following statements, please tell me to what extent you are aware of them by responding; Not at all, to some extent, or to a large extent.	To A Large Extent	To A Large Extent	To A Large Extent
	a. I must comply with GAIN requirements in order to keep my full cash benefits.	79.9	82.2	76.2
	b. I am aware that my cash benefits can be reduced if I do not comply with the GAIN program requirements	80.6	82.8	79.3
	c. I must attend GAIN Orientation to keep my full cash benefits	76.2	77.2	73.9
	d. I must sign a Welfare-to-Work Plan	58.2	62.0	54.6
	e. I must participate in an assigned program activity such as Job Club, Vocational Training, Education Program, Assessment, or any other approved GAIN activity.	69.3	71.0	64.5
	f. I must make satisfactory progress in an assigned activity such as Job Club, Vocational Training, Education Program, Assessment,	66.4	69.0	66.1

All Participants			
Survey Questions	Sanction Status (%)		
	Never	Short Term	Chronic
or any other approved GAIN activity.			
g. I must participate a total of at least 32/35 hours per week (35 hours for two-parent household) in employment or a combination of employment with another GAIN approved activity.	69.5	69.0	62.2
h. I cannot turn down a job offer without a good reason	61.9	63.0	62.3
i. I cannot quit a job, or work fewer hours, without a good reason	62.3	66.6	58.5
1. Not at all			
2. To some extent			
3. To a large extent			
7. DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE			
9. REFUSED			

All Participants			
Survey Questions	Sanction Status (%)		
	Never	Short Term	Chronic
Q. Did you experience any difficulty attending Orientation because of any of the following reasons: (Check as many as apply)			
1. Child care need	23.3	30.6	33.6
2. Transportation problems	16.8	25.9	28.3
3. Physical health problems	7.4	5.1	8.8
4. Mental health problems	3.0	3.2	1.9
5. Domestic violence problems	3.0	0	0.9
6. Needed to reschedule but could not contact the GAIN worker	10.6	13.4	13.9
7. DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE			
9. REFUSED			

All Participants			
Survey Questions	Sanction Status (%)		
	Never	Short Term	Chronic
Q. When you first entered the CalWORKs/GAIN program, was it clear to you that it was mandatory to attend Orientation and that not doing so could lead to a reduction in your cash benefits from the CalWORKs program?			
1. Yes	88.6	83.9	85.7
2. No	10.9	13.8	13.9
3. Don't Know/No Response	0	0	0
4. Refused	0.5	2.3	0.5

All Participants			
Survey Questions	Sanction Status (%)		
	Never	Short Term	Chronic
Q. What is the reason that you have not completed Orientation as yet? (Check as many as apply)			
1. Transportation problems	9.6	14.1	18.0
2. Child care needs	18.5	21.8	30.3
3. Did not know that I had to go to Orientation	9.6	6.4	6.6
4. Domestic violence problem	0.7	1.3	0.5
5. Mental health problem	2.7	1.3	1.9
6. Physical health	13.7	9.0	12.8
7. Substance abuse problem	0	0	0
8. Did not receive notification	9.6	10.3	8.5
9. Did not receive notification in time to attend Orientation	8.9	9.0	4.3
10. Were employed and could not leave work	18.5	25.6	13.3
11. Other _____	30.8	35.9	27.5
77. DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE			
99. REFUSED			
Q. Next, I would like to ask your opinion of the ways in which the Department of Public Social Services (DPSS) communicates with you in writing. I will read you the following statements and ask how often these have occurred. Notices of Action are used to inform you of changes in your program activities in the GAIN program.			
a. Notices of action are easy to	All the time 57.4	All the time 54.2	All the time 57.6



All Participants			
Survey Questions	Sanction Status (%)		
	Never	Short Term	Chronic
understand b. I have received notices of action in the language I requested c. I have received notices about the status of my CalWORKs case  d. I have received notices from my EW whenever my monthly cash benefits have changed e. I have received notices about changes in my GAIN status f. I can easily contact my GAIN worker whenever I have problems meeting the GAIN requirements  1. Never 2. Sometimes 3. All the time 7. DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE 9. REFUSED	82.5   62.0   68.3  56.7  43.7	81.0   57.3   61.7  55.3  43.4	82.1   53.6   62.6  52.4  33.4
Q. When you first were registered into CalWORKs/GAIN, how clear were the GAIN activities and requirements explained to you by your GAIN worker?  1. Very Well 2. Somewhat well 3. Not well at all 7. DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE 9. REFUSED	53.7 31.0 12.8 2.5	47.5 36.6 13.2 2.7	45.6 32.5 17.7 4.0 0.2
Q. Did your GAIN worker explain to you that in order to receive the full amount of cash aid you must participate in a GAIN activity or work at least 32 hours a week (35 hours a week for two parent household), unless you qualify for an exemption to the rules?  1. YES 2. NO 7. DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE	84.9 13.2 2.0	81.0 16.3 2.7	79.5 17.0 3.5

All Participants			
Survey Questions	Sanction Status (%)		
	Never	Short Term	Chronic
9. REFUSED			
Q. In the past 12 months, how often have you experienced difficulty in contacting your GAIN worker?  1. Never 2. Occasionally 3. Frequently 4. Always 7. DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE 9. REFUSED	6.2 33.0 29.7 30.1 1.0	5.9 31.9 30.3 31.1 0.8	3.5 35.8 26.4 33.1 1.2
Q. In the past six months, did you need any child care assistance?  1. YES 2. NO 7. DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE  9. REFUSED	43.3 56.0 0.7	46.1 53.2 0.7	39.0 60.0 1.1
Q. Were you able to obtain child care assistance in the past six months?  1. YES 2. NO 7. DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE 9. REFUSED	63.0 37.0	53.7 46.3	41.1 56.9 2.0

All Participants			
Survey Questions	Sanction Status (%)		
	Never	Short Term	Chronic
Q. What were the reasons that you were not able to obtain/utilize child care in the past six months? (Check all that apply.)  1. Did not know that it was available 22.2 11.1 16.8 2. Could not contact the GAIN worker to obtain assistance 32.2 30.2 32.9  5. Some Other Reason (specified) 42.2 49.2 50.3 7. DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE 9. REFUSED			
Q. Did either of the following things happen as a result of not being able to obtain child care assistance in the past six months? [CHECK ALL THAT APPLY]  1. Prevented you from meeting GAIN program requirements 13.3 15.9 24.2 2. Prevented you from accepting employment 15.6 7.9 9.4 3. Did not qualify for assistance 15.6 22.2 32.2 4. Other (Specify) 43.3 44.4 26.9  7. DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE 12.2 9.5 7.4 9. REFUSED			
Q. In the past six months, did you need any transportation assistance?  1. YES 47.2 49.5 43.8 2. NO [SKIPTO TRANS4] 52.2 50.2 55.0 7. DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE 0.5 0.3 1.2  9. REFUSED			

All Participants			
Survey Questions	Sanction Status (%)		
	Never	Short Term	Chronic
Q. Did you request assistance with transportation in the past six months?  1. YES 2. NO 7. DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE 9. REFUSED	72.8 26.4 0.8	72.6 27.4	53.5 45.8 0.7
Q. In the past six months, were you able to get transportation assistance through the GAIN program?  1. YES [SKIPTO TRANS4] 2. NO 7. DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE 9. REFUSED	75.1 23.8 1.0	66.0 34.0	53.3 46.7
Q. What were the reasons that you were not able to request/obtain/utilize transportation assistance in the past six months? (Check all that apply.)  1. Did not know that it was available 2. Could not contact the GAIN worker to obtain assistance 3. Did not qualify for assistance 4. Other (Specify) 7. DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE 9. REFUSED	30.8 20.8 10.8 26.7	29.0 23.7 11.8 23.7	34.0 26.6 9.9 26.1
Q. In the past six months, was there a time when your drinking, or the effects of drinking interfered with your ability to work, attend school, education, or attend training activities, or stay at home?  1. YES 2. NO [SKIPTO TRANS7] 7. DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE 9. REFUSED [SKIPTO TRANS7]	0.2 99.3 0.5	0.3 98.6 0.7 0.3	0.9 98.6 0.3 0.2

All Participants			
Survey Questions	Sanction Status (%)		
	Never	Short Term	Chronic
<p>Q. How often would you say this happened in the past six months?</p> <p>1. Once or twice</p> <p>2. 3-5 times</p> <p>3. 6-10 times</p> <p>4. 11-20 times</p> <p>5. More than 20 times</p> <p>7. DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE</p> <p>9. REFUSED</p>	100.0	100.0	33.3 16.7 0 0 16.7 33.3
<p>Q. With this definition in mind, did you ever use any drugs, such as sedatives, tranquilizers, painkillers, marijuana, cocaine, or heroin on your own during the past 6 months?</p> <p>1. YES</p> <p>2. NO [SKIPTO TRANS8]</p> <p>7. DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE</p> <p>9. REFUSED [SKIPTO TRANS8]</p>	3.0 96.6 0.4	2.0 97.3 0.3 0.3	3.1 96.3 0.3 0.3
<p>Q. In the past 6 months, did your use of drugs ever interfere with your work at school, or a job, or at home?</p> <p>1. YES</p> <p>2. NO [SKIPTO TRANS8]</p> <p>7. DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE</p> <p>9. REFUSED [SKIPTO TRANS8]</p>	2 (11.8) 15 (88.2)	1 (16.7) 5 (83.3)	4 (20.0) 16 (80.0)

All Participants			
Survey Questions	Sanction Status (%)		
	Never	Short Term	Chronic
Q. How often did this happen in the past six months?  _____ TIMES 777 DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE 999 REFUSED	1 (50.0) 1 (50.0)	0	2 (50.0) 1 (25.0) 1 (25.0)
Q. In the past six months, did you experience domestic violence with a current or former partner?  1. YES 2. NO [SKIPTO TRANS9] 7. DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE 9. REFUSED [SKIPTO TRANS9]	4.3 95.4 0.4	4.1 95.3 0.3 0.3	3.7 96.2 0 0.2
Q. Did you request help from your GAIN Service Worker?  1. YES 2. NO 7. DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE 9. REFUSED	41.7 58.3	33.3 66.7	29.2 70.8

All Participants			
Survey Questions	Sanction Status (%)		
	Never	Short Term	Chronic
<p>Q. The following questions are about how often you felt the following symptoms in the past week: [PROBE TO ENCOURAGE RESPONSE]</p> <p>a. I felt that I could not shake off the blues even with the help of my family and friends.</p> <p>b. I felt depressed.</p> <p>c. I thought my life had been a failure.</p> <p>d. I felt fearful.</p> <p>e. My sleep was restless.</p> <p>f. I felt lonely.</p> <p>g. I had crying spells.</p> <p>h. I felt sad.</p> <p>1. Rarely 2. Sometimes 3. Occasionally 4. Most of the time 7. DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE 9. REFUSED</p>	<p>Most of the time</p> <p>3.3</p> <p>6.6</p> <p>4.1</p> <p>4.5</p> <p>11.6</p> <p>7.0</p> <p>4.6</p> <p>7.3</p>	<p>Most of the time</p> <p>5.4</p> <p>10.2</p> <p>5.1</p> <p>2.7</p> <p>11.9</p> <p>8.5</p> <p>7.5</p> <p>7.8</p>	<p>Most of the time</p> <p>4.0</p> <p>7.1</p> <p>4.9</p> <p>3.4</p> <p>10.9</p> <p>5.9</p> <p>3.7</p> <p>6.5</p>
<p>Q. In the past six months have you taken any medication for depression or lack of sleep?</p> <p>1. YES</p> <p>2. NO</p> <p>7. DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE</p> <p>9. REFUSED</p>	<p>13.6</p> <p>85.7</p> <p>0.4</p> <p>0.4</p>	<p>12.2</p> <p>86.1</p> <p>0.3</p> <p>1.4</p>	<p>8.6</p> <p>91.1</p> <p>0</p> <p>0.3</p>
<p>Q. In the past six months has your mental health prevented you from being employed, finding employment or interfered with your ability to go to school?</p> <p>1. YES</p> <p>2. NO</p> <p>7. DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE</p> <p>9. REFUSED</p>	<p>10.0</p> <p>88.8</p> <p>0.9</p> <p>0.4</p>	<p>8.1</p> <p>89.8</p> <p>1.0</p> <p>1.0</p>	<p>10.8</p> <p>88.6</p> <p>0.5</p> <p>0.2</p>

All Participants			
Survey Questions	Sanction Status (%)		
	Never	Short Term	Chronic
Q. In the past six months has your mental health interfered with your ability to meet your Welfare-to-Work plan requirements?  1. YES 2. NO 7. DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE 9. REFUSED	8.4 89.0 2.3 0.4	5.8 91.9 1.4 1.0	7.9 90.6 1.4 0.2
Q. In the past six months have you utilized any of the Specialized Supportive Services (i.e., Substance Abuse, Mental Health, and Domestic Violence), in the GAIN program?  1. YES 2. NO 7. DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE 9. REFUSED	9.5 89.5 0.7 0.4	8.8 89.5 1.0 0.7	4.9 94.8 0.2 0.2
Q. What is your date of birth?  mm/dd/yyyy      DATE OF BIRTH 77/77/7777      DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE 99/99/9999      REFUSED	Age Mean   31.7	Age Mean   30.0	Age Mean   30.9



All Participants			
Survey Questions	Sanction Status (%)		
	Never	Short Term	Chronic
Q. Please describe which of the following group best describes your ethnic background. (Read choices if necessary.)			
1. Asian or Pacific Islander	2.1	2.7	2.5
2. Black or African American	25.0	27.1	22.5
3. Hispanic, Latino or Spanish origin	55.8	56.3	56.7
4. Caucasian or White	12.7	8.1	15.0
5 Other (SPECIFY: _____)	2.9	4.8	2.2
7. DON'T KNOW	0.5		0.5
9. REFUSED	1.1	1.0	0.8

All Participants				
Survey Questions		Sanction Status (%)		
		Never	Short Term	Chronic
Q.	What was the last grade in school that you completed?			
	1. Less than high school diploma/GED	31.6	32.2	36.8
	2. High school diploma/GED	31.9	32.9	35.1
	3. Some college, no degree	23.4	21.0	20.0
	4. Associate degree	8.2	10.2	4.6
	5. Bachelor's degree	2.3	2.4	1.7
	6. A degree higher than a Bachelor's (i.e. Teaching Credential, Masters, Ph.D., JD)	0.5	0.7	0.8
	7. DON'T KNOW/ NO RESPONSE	0.7	0.3	0.2
Q	Have you participated and any other type of education or job training activities in the past 12 months.			
	1. Technical/Trade/Vocational School	18.7	20.3	15.1
	2. JOB CORPS PROGRAM	1.4	1.0	1.4
	3. SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAM	2.5	2.0	1.4
	4. OTHER (SPECIFY) _____	10.5	9.5	8.5
	5. NONE	64.9	66.4	73.0
	7. DON'T KNOW	0.5	0.3	0.2
	9. REFUSED	1.4	0.3	0.5
Q.	What is your current marital status? Are you currently...			
	1. Married	20.0	14.9	22.8
	2. Legally separated	11.8	10.2	8.0
	3. Divorced	11.9	10.2	9.7
	4. Widowed	1.4	1.7	1.1
	5. Living with someone as married (but not legally married)	5.7	9.5	10.2
	6. Never married	47.4	52.9	47.3
	7. DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE	0.2	0.3	0.3
	9. REFUSED	1.6	0.3	0.6

All Participants				
Survey Questions		Sanction Status (%)		
		Never	Short Term	Chronic
Q.	Did your current marital status change in the past 12 months?			
	1. YES	4.6	6.8	4.5
	2. NO	93.8	92.2	94.9
	7. DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE	0.4	0.7	
	9. REFUSED	1.3	0.3	0.6
Q.	If your marital status changed last year, what was your marital status before it changed the last time?			
	1. Married	65.4	45.0	58.6
	2. Legally separated	7.7	20.0	3.5
	3. Divorced			
	4. Widowed			
	5. Living with someone as married (but not legally married)		15.0	17.2
	6. Never married	15.4	20.0	20.7
	7. Don't Know	11.5		

Survey Question	Sanctioned Participants	
	Sanction Status (%)	
	Short Term	Chronic
<p>Q. Do you know if your cash benefits were reduced or you were “sanctioned” in the past six months due to noncompliance with Welfare-to-Work Activities?</p> <p>1. YES 35.4 47.8</p> <p>2. NO [SKIPTO Q60] 57.7 46.7</p> <p>7. DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE [SKIPTO Q60] 6.9 5.4</p> <p>9. REFUSED [SKIPTO Q60] 0.2</p> <p>[INTERVIEWER: IF NO OR NOT SURE, CHECK THAT THE PARTICIPANT IS IN THE CORRECT SURVEY GROUP]</p>		
<p>Q. In your knowledge which of the following reasons contributed to a reduction in your cash aid? [CHECK AS MANY AS APPLY.]</p> <p>1. Did not understand program requirements 13.8 22.5</p> <p>2. Did not attend Orientation/Appraisal 21.8 36.1</p> <p>3. Did not go to Job Club 18.4 28.6</p> <p>4. Did not go to Assessment 23.0 21.1</p> <p>5. Did not complete Job Club 13.8 29.6</p> <p>6. Did not sign a Welfare-to-Work plan 8.1 16.3</p> <p>7. Failed to maintain satisfactory progress or stopped attending the assigned GAIN activity without “good Cause”. 17.2 31.0</p> <p>8. Did not provide proof of medical Exemption 9.2 14.6</p> <p>9. Terminated employment without a good cause. 5.8 6.5</p> <p>10. Did not follow the Compliance Plan 30.0 35.4</p> <p>11. Did not respond to a request on time 34.5 30.3</p> <p>12. Sanction was issued in error 25.3 25.9</p> <p>77. DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE</p> <p>99. REFUSED</p>		

Survey Question	Sanctioned Participants	
	Sanction Status (%)	
	Short Term	Chronic
<p>Q. Did you ever receive a Notice of Action or (NOA) from the GAIN office telling you that you were not in compliance with the GAIN program requirements?</p> <p>1. YES 2. NO [SKIPTO Q64] 7. DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE 9. REFUSED [SKIPTO Q64]</p>	<p>51.6 45.9 2.4</p>	<p>53.5 42.6 3.6 0.3</p>
<p>Q. Did you understand from the NOA or the GSW that your cash benefits would be affected or reduced unless you contacted the GAIN case worker by a certain date?</p> <p>1. YES 2. NO 7. DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE 9. REFUSED</p>	<p>96.1 2.4 1.6</p>	<p>89.4 8.8 1.8</p>
<p>Q. Were you able to contact your GAIN worker on time?</p> <p>1. YES 2. NO 7. DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE 9. REFUSED</p>	<p>71.3 27.9 0.8</p>	<p>59.3 38.6 2.0</p>

Survey Question	Sanctioned Participants	
	Sanction Status (%)	
	Short Term	Chronic
<p>Q. Why were you not able to contact your GAIN worker on time? Was it because...</p> <p>1. You could not reach the GAIN worker, 44.1 55.3</p> <p>2. Your appointment letter arrived too late or after the date of appointment 14.7 13.2</p> <p>3. Other (Specify): 29.4 28.1</p> <p>7. <u>DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE</u></p> <p>9. REFUSED 11.8 3.5</p>		
<p>Q. Did you know that if you had a valid reason for noncompliance, you could try and establish a "good cause" with your GAIN worker and not be "sanctioned" or "have your cash benefits reduced"?</p> <p>1. YES 59.4 61.5</p> <p>2. NO 38.6 34.8</p> <p>7. DON'T KNOW 2.0 3.3</p> <p>9. /NO RESPONSE 0.5</p> <p>REFUSED</p>		
<p>Q. Were you able to establish a "good cause"?</p> <p>1. YES 62.0 55.2</p> <p>2. NO 28.6 34.0</p> <p>7. DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE 9.0 10.3</p> <p>9. REFUSED 0.4 0.5</p>		
<p>Q. What were the reasons that you could not</p>		

Survey Question	Sanctioned Participants	
	Sanction Status (%)	
	Short Term	Chronic
<p>establish a “good cause” or became noncompliant?</p> <p>1. COULD NOT PRODUCE DOCUMENTATION FOR “GOOD CAUSE” 10.0 9.6</p> <p>2. WAS LATE IN PRODUCING DOCUMENTATION FOR “GOOD CAUSE” 2.9 3.4</p> <p>3. DID NOT UNDERSTAND THAT I HAD TO SHOW UP FOR AN APPOINTMENT 5.7 2.9</p> <p>4. NOTIFICATION WAS NOT RECEIVED IN TIME TO MAKE AN APPOINTMENT 5.7 5.7</p> <p>5. I WAS SICK 1.4 1.4</p> <p>6. I HAD CHILD CARE PROBLEMS 5.7 8.6</p> <p>7. I HAD TRANSPORTATION PROBLEMS 4.3 6.7</p> <p>8. WAS UNAWARE OF PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS 7.1 2.4</p> <p>9. MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS 1.4 1.0</p> <p>10. DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PROBLEMS 0 0</p> <p>11. COULD NOT CONTACT A GAIN SERVICE WORKER BY PHONE 12.9 12.0</p> <p>12. DID NOT WANT TO PARTICIPATE IN GAIN/WELFARE-TO-WORK ACTIVITIES 1.4 6.7</p> <p>13. OTHER 28.6 26.3</p> <hr/> <p>77. DON'T KNOW /NO RESPONSE</p> <p>99. REFUSED</p>		
<p>Q. After you were “sanctioned” or when your “cash benefits were reduced” did you try and contact your GAIN worker?</p> <p>1. YES 80.9 64.8</p> <p>2. NO [SKIPTO Q 70] 18.0 30.5</p> <p>7. DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE 1.1 4.1</p> <p>9. REFUSED [SKIPTO Q 70] 0.7</p>		

Survey Question		Sanctioned Participants	
		Sanction Status (%)	
		Short Term	Chronic
Q.	Were you able to contact your GAIN worker?		
1.	YES	61.1	58.1
2.	NO	38.9	41.9
7.	DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE		
9.	REFUSED		
Q.	Why could you not contact your GAIN worker?		
1.	Called the GSW but did not hear back from him/her	85.2	66.7
2.	Could not arrange a time to meet that was convenient for me and the GSW	11.1	3.7
3.	Did not know how I could reach my GSW	11.1	4.9
4.	Other (Specify):	3.7	25.9
7.	DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE		
9.	REFUSED		



Survey Question	Sanctioned Participants	
	Sanction Status (%)	
	Short Term	Chronic
<p>Q. In the GAIN program, did your GAIN worker tell you the circumstances and situations that could make you exempt or have “good cause” from having to work and/or participate in an approved GAIN activity at least 32 hours a week (35 hours a week for two parent household)? For example, having to care for a sick relative?</p> <p>1. YES</p> <p>2. NO</p> <p>7. DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE</p> <p>9. REFUSED</p>	<p>63.4</p> <p>30.1</p> <p>6.5</p>	<p>56.3</p> <p>37.7</p> <p>5.4</p> <p>0.7</p>
<p>Q. Do you understand what a Compliance Plan is?</p> <p>1. YES [SKIPTO Q72]</p> <p>2. NO</p> <p>3. NOT SURE</p> <p>7. DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE</p> <p>9. REFUSED</p> <p>[IF NO OR NOT SURE, READ COMPLIANCE PLAN DEFINITION]</p>	<p>41.1</p> <p>53.3</p> <p>3.3</p> <p>2.2</p>	<p>35.3</p> <p>56.5</p> <p>4.1</p> <p>3.0</p> <p>1.1</p>
<p>Q. Did your GAIN worker talk to you about making a Compliance Plan? In other words, what you need to do so that your cash grant would not be reduced.</p> <p>1. YES</p> <p>2. NO</p> <p>7. DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE</p> <p>9. REFUSED</p>	<p>33.3</p> <p>60.0</p> <p>6.7</p>	<p>24.9</p> <p>63.2</p> <p>10.8</p> <p>1.1</p>
<p>Q. Did you develop a Compliance Plan with your GAIN Services Worker?</p> <p>1. YES</p> <p>2. NO [SKIP TO Q75]</p> <p>7. DON'T KNOW /NO RESPONSE[SKIP TO Q75]</p> <p>9. REFUSED</p>	<p>28.1</p> <p>55.1</p> <p>16.9</p>	<p>16.8</p> <p>71.6</p> <p>10.5</p> <p>1.1</p>

Survey Question	Sanctioned Participants	
	Sanction Status (%)	
	Short Term	Chronic
Q. Did you agree to follow the Compliance Plan?  1. YES 2. NO 7. DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE 9. REFUSED	100.0	82.2 11.1 6.7
Q. Did your GAIN worker tell you why your cash aid was reduced or stopped?  1. YES 2. NO 7. DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE 9. REFUSED	79.8 20.2	71.5 24.4 3.1 1.0
Q. How did your GAIN worker inform you? [SELECT ALL THAT APPLY]  1. BY TELEPHONE CALL 2. BY MAIL 3. IN PERSON 4. OTHER:  7. DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE 9. REFUSED	38.0 52.1 25.4 5.6	33.2 63.0 10.9 2.4

Survey Question	Sanctioned Participants	
	Sanction Status (%)	
	Short Term	Chronic
<p>Q. After you were “sanctioned” or “when your cash benefits were reduced,” how have you been dealing with the loss of income? [SELECT ALL THAT APPLY]</p> <p>1. I GET HELP FROM OTHER FAMILY MEMBERS 25.8 32.2</p> <p>2. I WORK EXTRA TIME TO MAKE UP FOR LOST INCOME 12.4 10.2</p> <p>3. I WAS UNEMPLOYED AND BEGAN WORKING 9.0 2.4</p> <p>4. I RECEIVED CASH BENEFITS FROM ANOTHER PROGRAM SUCH AS SSI 3.4 1.4</p> <p>5. I GOT MORE CHILD SUPPORT 0 1.0</p> <p>6. I GOT HOUSING ASSISTANCE 0 1.0</p> <p>7. I MOVED TO MORE AFFORDABLE HOUSING 3.4 3.1</p> <p>8. OTHER (SPECIFY) 18.0 24.4</p> <p>77. DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE</p> <p>99. REFUSED</p>		
<p>Q. Since you have been “sanctioned” or since “your cash benefits have been reduced,” has your family experienced any of the following problems? [SELECT ALL THAT APPLY]</p> <p>1. Food shortages or hunger 21.4 24.1</p> <p>2. Being evicted or homelessness 3.4 7.8</p> <p>3. Unmet medical needs 3.4 8.5</p> <p>4. Unable to pay for necessities (groceries, diapers, etc...) 30.3 33.2</p> <p>5. Child care problems 18.0 18.0</p> <p>6. Transportation problems 16.9 26.8</p> <p>7. Family disruption such as separation or a divorce 2.3 4.1</p> <p>8. Domestic violence 0 1.7</p> <p>9. Loss of work 4.5 6.8</p> <p>10. Mental health conditions such as depression or anxiety 4.5 12.9</p> <p>11. Other(Specify) _____ 12.4 2.4</p> <p>77. DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE 18.0 18.6</p> <p>99. REFUSED 11.2 4.4</p>		

Survey Question	Sanctioned Participants	
	Sanction Status (%)	
	Short Term	Chronic
<p>Q. Ever since you were “sanctioned” or since “your cash grant was reduced” have you used, or are you currently using any of the following services due to the loss of income caused by the sanction? [SELECT ALL THAT APPLY].</p> <p>1. Emergency food assistance or food kitchen 7.9 7.8</p> <p>2. Emergency shelter 2.3 0.7</p> <p>3. Cash assistance from a charitable organization 3.4 2.4</p> <p>4. Battered woman’s shelter 0 0</p> <p>5. Housing assistance 2.3 2.7</p> <p>6. Other 11.2 13.9 (Specify)_____</p> <p>7. DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE 55.1 61.7</p> <p>9. REFUSED 20.2 12.2</p>		

Survey Question	Cured participants	
	Sanction Status (%)	
	Short Term N = 26	Chronic N = 38
<p>Q. Our records indicate your “sanction” was cured or that the adult portion of your cash aid was fully restored recently. Did you know that your sanction was lifted or cured recently?</p> <p>1. YES 41.1 38.0</p> <p>2. NO 51.8 52.0</p> <p>7. DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE 7.1 8.0</p> <p>9. REFUSED 2.0</p>		
<p>Q. When you were “sanctioned” or “when your cash benefits were reduced” how soon did you “cure” your sanction or how soon “were your cash benefits restored?”</p> <p>1. Within one month 44.0 57.9</p> <p>2. Within two months 20.0 7.9</p> <p>3. Within three months 16.0 10.5</p> <p>4. Within four months 4.0 7.9</p> <p>5. Within five months 0 0</p> <p>6. Within six months 0 2.6</p> <p>7. More than six months 4.0 0</p> <p>77. DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE 12.0 13.2</p> <p>99. REFUSED</p>		

Survey Question	Cured participants	
	Sanction Status (%)	
	Short Term N = 26	Chronic N = 38
<p>Q. Was your GAIN sanction “cured” or were your “cash benefits restored” because it was discovered that you were in need of Specialized Supportive Services?</p> <p>1. YES 15.4 10.5</p> <p>2. NO 84.6 81.6</p> <p>7. DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE 7.9</p> <p>9. REFUSED</p>		
<p>Q. Which specialized supportive service did you need? [SELECT ALL THAT APPLY]</p> <p>1. Mental Health 25.0 0</p> <p>2. Substance Abuse 0 0</p> <p>3. Domestic Violence 25.0 25.0</p> <p>7. DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE 75.0 50.0</p> <p>9. REFUSED</p>		

Survey Question	Cured participants	
	Sanction Status (%)	
	Short Term N = 26	Chronic N = 38
Q. Which of the following reasons contributed to your being "cured" from the sanction? (Choose as many as apply)		
1. You now understand the GAIN program requirements and have complied with the GAIN program requirements	16.0	76.3
3. You participated in Job Club	15.4	39.5
4. You attended Assessment appointment	30.8	42.1
5. You completed Job Club	15.4	15.8
6. You attended Orientation/Appraisal appointment	26.9	52.6
7. You complied with program component that was agreed to in the Welfare-to-Work Plan	38.5	57.9
8. You provided proof for "good cause".	46.2	71.1
9. You enrolled in the mutually agreed to education or training programs	19.2	36.8
10. You went to State Fair Hearing and was reinstated	3.9	21.1
77. DON'T KNOW/NO RESPONSE	11.5	5.3
99. REFUSED		

## **APPENDIX B**

### **TECHNICAL APPENDIX**

#### **Introduction**

The technical appendix describes the methodology used for the study of CalWORKs participants that are chronically sanctioned in chapter 3 through analyzing a participant survey. The appendix has several sections that elaborate on the participant survey design and sample selection and statistical tests and analysis including multivariate models and explanatory variables used in the models.

#### **Participant Survey**

This study used a variety of research techniques to analyze group differences between the chronically sanctioned participants and two comparison groups—short-term and never sanctioned participants. Data was collected using a survey questionnaire. In addition, administrative records from Department of Public Social Services (DPSS) were linked to survey data to enhance results.

The purpose of the survey was to understand group differences between the chronically sanctioned participants and the comparison groups in person and program level barriers which are not available from the administrative data sources. Moreover, the survey is designed to provide information on participant awareness of their sanction status and knowledge of sanction rules policies. Survey is structured around an earlier survey conducted by University of California at Los Angeles, Institute for Social Research in 2001 for sanctioned participants in Alameda, Fresno, Kern and San Diego Counties.

The survey was conducted by telephone between the last weeks of February and May, 2005 and contains approximately 1,500 respondents. California State University at Fullerton, Social Science Research Center (SSRC) administered the survey with the help of the CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interview) system in English and Spanish.

#### **Sample Selection**

The first step was to identify those participants that would match the sample selection criteria. These participants construct the population from which the sample is selected which is called the sample frame. This population is selected from those participants who entered CalWORKs after April 2002<sup>56</sup> and hence not received cash aid prior to this date. This is in contrast with the analysis conducted in Chapter 2, where monthly sanction rates are explored for all participants, including those entered welfare before 2002 such as participants entered welfare before the implementation of the welfare reform. Furthermore, only English and Hispanic speaking participants were selected since the survey was conducted only in these two languages for cost and logistical



reasons. The limitations imposed by excluding non-English and non-Spanish speaking participants are elaborated later. Finally, only one participant was selected randomly from households with two participants.

The sampling frame had a total of 11,759 participants who met the above selection criteria. A random sample of participants from these households was selected from the stratum of sanction status using SAS survey procedures.<sup>57</sup> A disproportionate stratified random sample was obtained by separating the population elements into non-overlapping groups within this stratum and selecting random samples from each category or level of the stratum. The sanctioned stratum has three categories—chronically, short-term and never sanctioned.

This stratification is desirable because in the population, as illustrated in Table B.1 the proportions of sanctioned participants are much lower relative to never sanctioned participants. Hence, over sampling of sanctioned participants is necessary to obtain accurate results from the survey. Otherwise, a random selection of survey participants would not yield adequate number of sanctioned participants to have reliable estimates within 5 percent of margin of error. The number of survey respondents selected by the sampling procedure generated sample sizes for each sanction status that generates 5 percent margin of error or less at the 95 percent confidence level. Hence, it is accepted that, all estimates of the statistical findings in this study are within +/- 5 percent or less of the true population values.

On the other hand, this over sampling scheme generated a sample distribution not representing the distribution of the population as shown in Table B.1. This introduces bias into any estimate obtained from the sample data set because statistical procedures will give greater weight to those groups over sampled. This problem requires using post-stratification weights to correct this bias. Post-stratification weights used in the multivariate analysis are shown in Tables B.1.<sup>58</sup> Weights are derived by dividing population numbers by the survey (sample) numbers for each sanction category. This weighting scheme basically weights the total number of respondents to the size of the population or sample frame. Hence, a weighted frequency distribution for survey respondents would yield the size of the population. As expected the weight of never sanction group is much higher since group was under sampled.

**Table B.1 Sampling Proportions and Weights**

Sanction Status	Population #	Survey #	Population %	Survey %	Weight
<b>Chronically Sanctioned</b>	2,965	649	25.2%	43.1%	4.57
<b>Never Sanctioned</b>	7,079	561	60.2%	37.3%	12.62
<b>Short-Term Sanctioned</b>	1,715	295	14.6%	19.6%	5.81
<b>Total</b>	11,759	1,505	100.0%	100.0%	N/A

## **Data Limitations**

One particular data limitation of this study is due to excluding non-English and non-Spanish speaking participants as noted earlier. Even though the proportion of this group is small (less than 9 percent of the total population) among Welfare-to-Work participants, it generates some bias that ought to be noted. The significant majority (approximately 2/3<sup>rd</sup>) of this group are never sanctioned white participants such as participants with Armenian or European origin. The remaining 1/3<sup>rd</sup> are never sanctioned Asian participants not speaking English. Excluding these groups, inflated the proportions of African American and Hispanic participants in the never sanctioned category while deflating the shares of White and Other participants. These differences can be observed by comparing Table 2.1 in Chapter 2 to the Table B.3 below which shows the ethnic distribution of survey respondents by sanction status. As a result, the results of ethnic comparisons should be done with caution keeping in mind this limitation.

## **Non-Response Rates**

For voluntary surveys, one major threat to the accuracy of the survey estimates is response. If participants responding to survey are systematically different from those who did not respond, then the accuracy of the estimates is questionable. However, non-response is a problem if the non-respondents are a non-random sample of the total sample. In order to correct the non-response bias weights are used by means of different techniques.

For the majority of approximately 5,200 sampled participants provided to SSRC for contact, the telephone numbers provided from the administrative records were incorrect. Table B.2 summarizes reason codes by SSRC for the 3,689 non-respondents. The table shows these codes by sanction status and compares the proportions to respondents.

The first column in the table illustrates response rates which is much lower for chronically sanctioned participants.<sup>59</sup> The last row of the Table shows the distribution of non-respondents by reason codes. Over 70 percent of non-responses were due to incorrect phone information. Only 5 percent of the participants refused to respond to the survey. Moreover, there is no significant difference among three study groups in terms of non-response codes.

Comparing the proportion of non-respondents to respondents, it is observed that chronically sanctioned group had significantly higher share among non-respondents while for the never sanction group the opposite is observed. It is rather expected, since it is more likely to have accurate contact information of never sanctioned participants relative to chronically sanctioned ones. Due to incorrect contact information, chronically sanctioned group showed much lower response rate and had a larger share among non-respondents relative to respondents.

Most non-response weighting schemes involve post-stratification. Hence, the same post-stratification weights discussed earlier also help in adjusting for non-response bias. By forcing survey totals to match population totals, the bias generated by higher number of chronically sanctioned non-respondents is alleviated.<sup>60</sup>

A more rigorous adjustment would be using a regression model to estimate the differences between non-respondents to respondents using observable characteristics available from administrative data. A preliminary analysis showed that, there are not significant differences among non-respondents and respondents in terms of observable characteristics such as demographics—with the exception that there is slightly higher number of African-Americans in the non-respondent group. Hence, this study only used post-stratification weights for more accurate results.

**Table B.2 Non-Response (NR) Rates**

Sanction Status	Response Rate	No Contact %	Not Eligible %	Refused %	NR #	NR %	Respondent %
Chronic	25.8	50.2	51.1	49.2	1,864	50.4	43.2
Never	33.8	31.1	29.8	30.0	1,135	30.7	37.3
Short-Term	56.4	18.7	19.1	20.8	699	18.9	19.6
Total		100	100	100	3,698	100	100
% in NR		70.8	23.9	5.4		100	

## Statistical Tests and Analysis

### Statistical Tests

This study examines differences between three outcomes for participants—to become chronically, short-term or never sanctioned. Since survey participants were randomly selected, the impact of several explanatory factors on these outcomes can be measured as the difference in outcome values. This study uses the Chi-squared test ( $X^2$ ) of homogeneity to test the impact of factors such as person and program level barriers. This test is a two-sample test for the equality of two or more proportions. It facilitates comparison of sample proportions across multiple groups when the data is categorical. Several  $X^2$  test assess whether the proportions of chronically and never sanctioned participants are equal for those experiencing a specific barrier. If this  $X^2$  statistic is significant, then we accept the hypothesis that the tested barrier contributes to become chronically sanctioned.

### Statistical Significance

All statistical conclusions involve constructing two mutually exclusive hypotheses, termed the null ( $H_0$ ) and alternative ( $H_1$ ) hypotheses. These hypotheses describe all possible outcomes with respect to an inference. A researcher is frequently confronted with the challenge of selecting the correct hypothesis, or at least the hypothesis that has

the most validity based on the available empirical evidence. In evaluation research, where the main focus is on assessing the effectiveness of social programs, competing hypotheses are typically examined in terms of program effects and are shown as follows:

$$H_0 : \text{Program Effect} = 0$$
$$H_1 : \text{Program Effect} \neq 0 \text{ (not equal to 0)}$$

The null hypothesis is so termed because it usually refers to an outcome in which there is "no difference" or "no effect" indicated by a comparison. Usually in social research it is expected that evaluated programs will make a difference, and for this reason a program effects is seen as consistent with the alternative hypothesis (as against the null hypothesis).

Significance tests assist researchers in parsing out the validity of competing hypotheses. The result of a significance test depends on the selection of a significance level along with the sample size used for the comparison. Significance levels show you how likely a result is due to chance. In most social research, the "rule of thumb" is to set significance levels at 5 percent, which is labeled as alpha ( $\alpha$ ). Significance levels show the odds that the observed result is due to chance. When the test statistic (such as the result of a chi-square test) is less than the selected  $\alpha$  level, the null hypothesis ("no difference"/"no effect") is rejected in favor of the alternate hypothesis. Under these circumstances, the researcher is able to conclude that there is a program effect. For example, if a chi square test shows a probability of .04, it means that there is a 96 percent ( $1-.04=.96$ ) chance that the program outcomes between different groups are different, or there is a 4 percent likelihood that the difference or program effect may occur due to chance or randomness.

A significance level (or  $\alpha$ ) also refers to the probability of rejecting the null hypothesis when in reality the null hypothesis is correct. This is called a Type I Error. A Type I error, in other words, refers to the likelihood of concluding that there is a program effect, i.e., rejecting the null hypothesis when in reality there is insufficient evidence to determine the presence of a program effect. This is the odds of confirming our theory (program effect) incorrectly. On the other hand, there is a Type II Error, labeled as beta ( $\beta$ ), which refers to the odds of generating a "no program effect" outcome when in fact there is such an effect. The type II error, in other words, is the odds of not confirming a theory that is true.  $1 - \beta$  is known as the power of a test. The power of a test is the ability of a statistical test to detect true effects when they exist. Thus, power is the probability that a null hypothesis is rejected when it is false, i.e., the probability that you will detect the program effects when they exist.

Researchers prefer to have the power of a test be as large as possible in order to minimize false negatives or capture true effects when they exist. On the other hand, researchers also prefer to keep the significance level small to minimize false positives. However, there is a trade-off between these two possibilities. The lower the  $\alpha$ , the lower the power and vice versa. The more stringent a significance level is, the greater the likelihood a researcher will mistakenly conclude that the response was ineffective when

it actually worked. The less stringent a level is, the greater the possibility that the researcher will mistakenly endorse a response that in reality has no effect.

It is generally accepted that a significance level set at 5 percent is optimal. However, 5 percent is essentially an *arbitrary* selection. The 5 percent level comes from academic publications, where a theory usually has to have at least a 95 percent chance of being correct to be considered worth communicating to a larger research community. Moreover, many academic papers test strictly controlled experimental designs where confounding factors and data problems are less influential. But, why should alpha values be so small? Why put such a premium on not incorrectly accepting alternative hypotheses? It is understandable that in scientific experiments researchers ought not to put their faith in conclusions unless the conclusions are backed by strong empirical evidence. However, in evaluating public programs, the significance level may be less stringent. Usually, these programs are designed in response to serious problems. Environments cannot be controlled and data measures cannot be perfect. Moreover, researchers should be sensitive to the concerns of policymakers of accidentally rejecting the effectiveness of a good program.

For instance, if a test shows a .06 probability, it means that it has a 94 percent chance of being true. Although, in this example, researchers may not be as certain to establish a position empirically as if they had a 95 percent chance of being true, nevertheless the odds still are that the theory under investigation is true. In the public policy world if something has a 90 percent chance of being true (probability =.1), it cannot be considered proven, but it is probably better to act as if it were true rather than false. Hence, in deciding the rejection or acceptance of research hypotheses this report established a 10 percent significance level as its standard and conducted all significance tests against this level.

## **Multivariate Models**

In general, outcome differences—such as the outcome of becoming chronically sanctioned—are very likely to reflect the simultaneous effect of multiple factors. For this reason, the differences may change when we control for other factors that influence outcomes. The precision of estimation increases when other factors that help explain variations in outcome measures are included. This requires using more complex multivariate methods. The regression models used in this study specify that the outcome variables are (linear) functions of a set of explanatory variables. The coefficient of each explanatory variable represents the effect of a change in the explanatory variable on the outcome, holding all other factors constant.

The study developed two models. The first model (model I) estimated the effect of several barriers and other factors on the likelihood of becoming chronically sanctioned by comparing chronically sanctioned participants against never sanctioned participants. The second model estimated the effect of the same set of variables on the probability of becoming chronically sanctioned by comparing chronically sanctioned participants against short-term sanctioned participants. The main difference between two models is

the comparison groups. This difference is reflected in the interpretation of odds-ratios as follows; the odds-ratios of model I should be interpreted as the contribution of one variable to the likelihood of becoming chronically sanctioned relative to participants who are not sanctioned. On the other hand, the odds-ratios of model II should be interpreted as the contribution of one variable to the likelihood of becoming chronically sanctioned given that participant is already sanctioned for the first time. Hence, the second model measures the effect of a factor after a participant is sanctioned and show if the effect leads to staying sanctioned longer or getting sanctioned multiple times.

For most of the factors, the effect (represented by the estimated coefficient which is converted to odds ratios in the table) is significant for both models. This means that, these factors not only make participants more likely to become chronically sanctioned relative to never sanctioned participants but also stay sanctioned longer or get sanctioned multiple times when they get sanctioned for the first time. These factors strongly predict the outcome to become chronically sanctioned.

However, there are some factors which are significant for the first model but not for the second. Such a relationship is interpreted differently. In that case, this factor is likely to make participants get sanctioned in the short-run but not in the long-run. All these relationships are also confirmed when a separate model is estimated to predict the probability of getting sanctioned in the short-run by comparing short-run participants to the never sanctioned group. These factors appear to be significant in this model confirming that they contribute to become short-term sanctioned. For example, number of aided persons in the household is such a variable.

Finally, there are factors which are estimated to be significant by the second model but not by the first one. This means that these factors do not make participants to be sanctioned in the short-run but when a participant is sanctioned then she/he is more likely to become chronically sanctioned. For example, homelessness variable represents such a relationship.

Since outcome variables estimated in this study are categorical, logistic regression models are used<sup>61</sup>. A general form for these models is shown below where  $i$  indexes observations,  $K$  is the number of explanatory or predictor variables, and  $n$  denotes sample size. The regression models used post-stratification weights discussed earlier, i.e. they are weighted regression models.

$$Y_i = a_0 + a_1X_{i1} + a_2X_{i2} + \dots + a_KX_{iK} + e_i \quad i = 1, \dots, n$$

$Y_i$  = Probability to become chronically sanctioned for the  $i^{\text{th}}$  unit

$a_0$  = Coefficient for the intercept

$a_1$  = Coefficient for the first variable used in the model for the  $i^{\text{th}}$  unit

$X_{i1}$  = First explanatory variable used in the model for the  $i^{\text{th}}$  unit

$a_k$  = Coefficient for the  $K^{\text{th}}$  variable used in the model for the  $i^{\text{th}}$  unit

$X_{iK}$  =  $K^{\text{th}}$  explanatory variable used in the model for the  $i^{\text{th}}$  unit

The details of all the explanatory variables used in these models are presented in Tables B.4 below.

In the logistic regression models used in the study, the effects of explanatory variables are measured using odds-ratios. The odds of an event are calculated as the number of events divided by the number of non-events. For example, for participants with no work experience, the odds of becoming chronically sanctioned is equal to the ratio of total number of participants with no work experience and chronically sanctioned to the total number of participants with no work experience and never sanctioned. On the other hand, for participants with prior work experience, the odds of becoming chronically sanctioned is equal to the ratio of total number of participants with work experience and chronically sanctioned to the total number of participants with work experience and never sanctioned. Then the ratio of the first number to the second gives us the odds-ratio of becoming chronically sanctioned for not having prior work experience.

The odds ratio is a way of comparing whether the probability of a certain event is the same for two groups. An odds ratio of 1 implies that the event is equally likely in both groups. An odds ratio greater than one implies that the event is more likely in the first group. An odds ratio less than one implies that the event is less likely in the first group. For example, if the odds ratio is 1.4, it means that the odds of becoming chronically sanctioned for participants with no work experience are 40 percent greater than those with prior work experience. Throughout the study, the odds-ratios are interpreted as the relative likelihood of an outcome due to a factor for simplicity.

The significance of explanatory variables are determined looking at the " $P > \chi^2$ " columns in Table 3.5, in chapter III. These columns basically show the p-values that are compared to the selected significance level (10 percent) to determine whether a factor is statistically significant. This comparison in a way verifies if a specific factor may be accepted as a good predictor in explaining the outcome variables. If this p-value is less than .10 then the report accepts that the variable is statistically significant. In statistical terms, a p-value is the probability of obtaining a finding at least as "impressive" as that obtained, assuming the null hypothesis is true, so that the finding was the result of chance alone.

Table B.3 below presents the descriptive data for the variables used in two models. The  $\chi^2$  significance tests noted with an "\*" in columns two and three represent the comparison of never and short-term sanctioned groups against the chronically sanctioned group. The "\*" confirms that the test is statistically significant.

**Table B.3 Respondent Characteristics**

<b>Explanatory Variables</b>	<b>Chronically Sanctioned %</b>	<b>Never Sanctioned %</b>	<b>Short-Term Sanctioned %</b>
<b>Person Level Barriers</b>			
Unaware of Compliance Rules	26.0	21.2*	18.6*
Limited Education—Less than High School	36.8	31.5*	32.2
No Work Experience	56.9	43.1*	46.8*
Earning less than \$8/hr	88.3	77.2*	81.0*
Need Specialized Supportive Services	21.0	23.5	22.0
Use Specialized Supportive Services	4.9	9.5*	8.8*
Physical Disability	16.2	18.7	20.7*
Homelessness	18.5	13.7*	17.0
Housing Instability	46.5	34.4*	50.5
Exempted other than Disability	38.2	27.3*	46.8*
<b>Program Level Barriers</b>			
Need Child Care Services	38.9	43.3	46.1*
Need but Could not Use Child Care	22.9	16.0*	21.4
Need Transportation Services	43.7	47.2	49.5*
Need but Could not Use Transportation	31.2	21.4*	25.8*
Could not Contact GAIN Worker	38.1	33.1*	35.6
<b>Other Factors</b>			
Number of Aided Persons—Mean	3.4	3.1*	3.0*
Household Size			
2-3 Persons	23.5	34.8*	30.5*
4-5 Persons	43.1	42.3	45.8
More than 5 Persons	33.4	22.3*	23.7*
Male	19.9	13.7*	17.0
Age Group			
18-24 Years Old	26.6	28.5	36.3*
25-34 Years Old	39.3	33.5	31.5*
35-44 Years Old	24.2	24.6	20.3
45 Years or Older	9.9	13.3*	11.9
Ethnicity			
African-American	23.4	25.1	27.5
Hispanic	55.2	55.1	56.3
Other	5.2	8.4*	5.4
White	16.1	11.4*	10.9*
Primary Language English	85.1	79.8*	83.1
Non-Compliant more than Once	84.6	43.1*	83.1
DPSS GAIN Regions	80.3	79.7	77.6

\* Statistically significant



**Table B.4 Details of Explanatory Variables Used in Regression Models**

<b>Person Level Barriers</b>	
<b>Unaware of Compliance Rules</b>	Continuous— the sum of Participant Survey Questions 24a through Question 24i, if sum of answers totaled < 19 where the index is constructed as follows; 1 if answered not at all 2 if answered to some extent 3 if answered to a large extent
<b>Limited Education</b>	Dichotomous— 1: If Participant Survey Question 86 =1 ("Less than high school diploma/GED"). 0: Otherwise
<b>No Work Experience</b>	Dichotomous— 0: If Participant Survey Question 14 = 1 (currently employed) or Q16 > 0 (worked in the past 12 months) 1: Otherwise
<b>Earnings Less than \$8/hr</b>	Dichotomous— 1: If Participants Survey Question 19 < \$8/hr 0: Otherwise
<b>Need Specialized Supportive Services</b>	Dichotomous— 1: If Participant Survey Questions 48 and 49 =1 (indicated need for substance abuse services) or Question 51 =1 (need for domestic violence services) or Questions 54, 55, or 56 =1 (indicated need for mental health services) in the past 6 months 0: Otherwise
<b>Use Specialized Supportive Services</b>	Dichotomous— 1: If Question 57 =1 (indicated respondent used supportive services during past 6 months).
<b>Physical Disability</b>	Dichotomous— 1: If disabled status derived from GEARS or LEADER or GEARS exempt status due to disability. 0: Otherwise
<b>Homelessness</b>	Dichotomous— 1: If Participant Survey Question 1 = 4, 5, or 6 (respondent currently living in a shelter, hotel/motel or other kind of shelter) or Participant Survey Questions 2d, 2e or 2f = 1, (during the past 12 months lived in shelter, hotel/motel or other kind of emergency shelter) or used a district office address or another shelter based on LEADER 0: Otherwise
<b>Housing Instability</b>	Dichotomous— 1: If changed address more than once based on LEADER 0: Otherwise

Program Level Barriers	
<b>Need Child Care Services</b>	Dichotomous— 1: If Participant Survey Question 38 = 1 (respondent reported need for child care). 0: Otherwise
<b>Need but Could Not Use Child Care</b>	Dichotomous— 1: If Participant Survey Question 38 =1, (reported need for child care) and Participant Survey Question 39 = 2, (unable to obtain child care). 0: Otherwise
<b>Need Transportation Services</b>	Dichotomous— 1: If Participant Survey Question 30_1 = 1, (respondent reported need for transportation services.) 0: Otherwise
<b>Needed but Could Not Use Transportation Services</b>	Dichotomous— 1: Participant Survey Question 42 =1, (respondent reported needing transportation services) and Participant Survey Question 44 =2, (respondent reported they could not obtain transportation assistance). 0: Otherwise
<b>Could not Contact GAIN Worker</b>	Dichotomous— 1: Participant Survey Question 31f =1, (respondent reports they are always unable to contact their GSW after receiving a Notice of Action) or Participant Survey Question 37 = 3 or 4, (during past 12 months respondent always or frequently had trouble contacting their GSW). 0: Otherwise
<b>Exempted Other Than Disability</b>	Dichotomous— 1: Exempt status other than disability derived from GEARS or LEADER administrative data. 0: Otherwise
Other Factors	
<b>Number of Aided Persons</b>	Continuous— Total of number of aided adults and children based on LEADER.
<b>Household Size</b>	Dichotomous— Based on Participant Survey Questions 3a and 3b, (total number of adults and children in the household); “2-3” If total is 2 to 3 persons “4-5” If total is 4 to 5 persons “5+” If total is more than 5 persons
<b>Male</b>	Dichotomous— 1: If gender is Male based on LEADER 0: Otherwise (Female)

<b>Age Group</b>	Dichotomous— Based on the age derived from date at time of interview and date of birth from LEADER; “18-24” in the 18-24 age bracket “25-34” in the 25-34 age bracket “35-44” in the 35-44 age bracket “45+” 45 or older
<b>Ethnicity</b>	Dichotomous: Derived from LEADER; “African American”, “Hispanic” “White” “Other” (Mostly Asians)
<b>Primary Language English</b>	Dichotomous: Derived from LEADER; “English” “Spanish”
<b>Non-Compliant More Than Once</b>	Dichotomous: Derived from GEARS ; 1: If had two or more noncompliance incidents 0: Otherwise
<b>GAIN Regions</b>	Dichotomous: Derived from GEARS ; “DPSS” Regions 1,3,4,5,6 “Contract” Otherwise

## DATA SOURCES

The study used three different data sources. The first two data sources are derived from the participant survey and focus groups as described earlier. The third data source is the administrative data files provided by DPSS which were linked to survey data to enhance the findings.

GEARS and LEADER, data files were used to collect data on several data elements, which were not either available from the survey or the self-declared responses of survey respondents were found to be inaccurate. In some fields administrative records were also used to update missing information. The administrative files were used several field such as demographic information, welfare tenure, GAIN region, number of aided persons in the household, non-compliance histories, housing barriers and earlier exemptions including physical disability. The administrative data fields were collected for these participants going back up to two years from the interview dates of the survey respondents. The administrative files were particularly useful in the categorization of participants in terms of chronically, short-term and never sanctioned based on their sanction histories.

## **APPENDIX C**

### **Focus Group Methodology**

#### **C.1 The Purposes and Advantages of a Qualitative Methodology**

The research on sanctions addresses two broad questions: To what extent do sanctions achieve their goal of encouraging welfare parents to participate in GAIN's mandated activities? And how, and at what points in the program, can the number of sanctions be decreased? Quantitative and qualitative methods approach these questions in different, but complementary, ways. Using random samples and standardized questions, surveys have the advantage of producing statistical data that identify patterns that are broadly representative of, and can be generalized to, the larger participant populations.

By contrast, focus groups are moderated discussions of a predetermined topic that involve a small group of people. Engaged in a focused, yet informal and open-ended discussion, focus groups reveal what surveys cannot—in this case, an in-depth, “person level” exploration of participants’ perceptions and experiences with sanctions. However, when reading their words, it is important to keep in mind that while focus groups provide an understanding of individual and shared experiences and perceptions, their members may not be representative of GAIN participants as a whole. Therefore, their responses may not be generally applied to the larger population. However, the advantage of this qualitative method is that it can capture the knowledge and lived experience of sanctioned parents. Focus groups also hold the possibility of discovering new information that may not have been previously known or included in surveys.

Focus groups thus complement surveys by revealing important data obscured by numbers, a concrete sense of how things really happen. For participants, this means focusing on processes and connections between knowing about the requirements of the GAIN program and sanctions for not following them, the impact of sanctions on participants’ decisions to comply or not to comply with program requirements, and the consequences of noncompliance on the lives of parents and their children. While it may not be generally applied to larger populations, as noted above, the strength of focus group findings may be demonstrated in instances in which there is consistency between focus group findings and results of quantitative surveys.

Finally, participants sometimes spoke sharply and critically. Researchers encouraged openness and assured them that their anonymity and privacy were protected by Federal and State laws. In assessing such findings, it is important to remember that the purpose of the research was to tap experience and perceptions that may, from the points of view of GAIN participants, affect compliance with the program rather than to seek verification of what participants say. It is also important to note that participants are literally speaking in their own words, and that everyday, unrehearsed speech is very different from carefully crafted, grammatically correct written text. The goal of focus groups is to capture the spontaneity and unedited insights of an informal discussion. In

accordance with accepted conventions for qualitative research, focus group members' words are quoted verbatim and indented in the report.

## **C.2 The Design and Conduct of Focus Group Methodology**

All decisions about the research design, as well as the interpretation and presentation of focus group results, were made in consultation with the RES survey research team.

**Sampling Design:** A purposeful sampling design was used to gather data from four participant focus groups conducted in January 2006. Consistent with the objectives of the study to gain insight into the relatively high rates of sanctions in the County of Los Angeles, the following criteria were used to select participants for inclusion in the groups:

1. English speaking Hispanic and African American sanctioned participants from the Inglewood district office (district 083) and its surrounding zip codes. Sanctioned participants were currently sanctioned and in their first sanction instance for 90 days or less so that they are categorized as short-term sanctioned participants.
2. English speaking Hispanic and African American sanctioned participants from the Inglewood district office (district 083). Sanctioned participants were currently sanctioned and sanctioned either multiple times or for more than six months so that they are categorized as chronically sanctioned participants.
3. Spanish speaking formerly sanctioned and currently compliant (cured) participants from the Westlake district (district 038) office. Sanctioned participants were formerly sanctioned either multiple times or for more than six months so that they are categorized as chronically sanctioned participants.
4. English speaking Hispanic and African American participants from the Inglewood (district 083) and Rancho Dominguez district (district 083) offices. These participants had already left welfare either in compliance or while in sanction status. Hence, this group is categorized as leavers.

The sanctioned participants were selected from the population sanctioned in the month of October 2005. This sample also included participants that were sanctioned earlier but had their sanctions cured before October 2005. This allowed the selection of both currently sanctioned and recently cured participants for the interviews. The leaver population was selected from participants who left welfare between August and October 2005 so that they could be reached easier. All the participants in the focus group interviews were post-reform participants who entered CalWORKs program for the first time after April 2002.

The participant pools for random selection were 206, 602, 124 and 449 for four groups noted above respectively. Random sampling using the SAS program was used to select participants for the focus group interviews.

**Recruitment:** To protect the privacy and wishes of potential focus group members, RES sent letters to parents drawn from its lists containing randomly selected names of participants whose language and sanction profiles matched the sampling design. The letters explained the purpose and importance of the sanction study and invited participation. Parents who were not interested in attending were given refusal cards to send to RES. Focus group researchers recruited participants by telephone from the list of participants who had not returned refusal cards. Given many no answers, wrong and disconnected numbers, and requests to leave messages, the main problem was reaching and actually talking to potential recruits. Recruitment required going through at least 100 names per group to achieve recruiting goals. It took 200 names for recruiting leavers who were no longer in contact with GAIN. The many parents contacted politely showed no interest or an interest that was encouraged with follow-up calls.

In the recruitment phone contacts, parents were informed that they had been recruited randomly and that we wanted to hear about their experiences and perceptions of GAIN sanctions and compliance with GAIN in order to better understand how the process is working in the County of Los Angeles and to enhance participation in the program. They were also told that the group would be held at a GAIN office, that it would last for about two hours, and that anything they said in the group would remain confidential. To encourage involvement, parents were promised a \$50 food gift certificate for their participation.

Ten participants were recruited for each focus group with the hope from previous experience that at least six would show up, an ideal number for a focus group discussion. When short of this number in a group, researchers made up their quota by conducting long telephone interviews with parents who indicated a willingness to attend, but were unable to on the days that focus groups were conducted.

**Participant Profiles:** In the end, twenty-six parents were interviewed in the qualitative component of the study. They ranged in age from their 20s to 50s. Only two men, both married, participated. The rest were single mothers, with the exception of a parent who got married after leaving CalWORKs.

**Table C.1 Participant Profiles**

<b><u>Focus Groups</u></b>	<b><u>Sanction Histories</u></b>
Short-term sanctioned/first instance English speaking	7 (all first sanctions)
Long-term/first instance English speaking	6 (all first sanctions)
Long-term Cured (214-365 days) Spanish speaking	4 (all multiple sanctions) 3 (all 1st sanctions, 2 long, 1 short)
Leavers of CalWORKs English-speaking	
Sanctioned when left Compliant when left	3 (1 multiple, 2 first, long duration) 3 (all first, 2 long and 1 short duration)
Total Participants: 26	

All samples were drawn in October 2005.

“Leavers” left GAIN between June and September 2005.

**Definitions of Terms:**

Short Sanction—six months or less

Long Sanction—more than six months

Short Cure—three months or less

Long Cure—six months or more

**C.3 Focus Group Conduct**

Researchers formulated focus group questions based on a review of study objectives described in the research plan provided by RES and in consultation with the RES survey team. Focus group questions were also pre-tested and submitted to service providers who regularly worked with participants and to DPSS for review and revision prior to conducting the focus groups. The focus group facilitators asked open-ended questions to elicit “person-level” data regarding the extent that sanctions, instituted for the purpose of compelling welfare participants to participate in mandated activities, achieve their intended goal. Specifically, questions were designed to focus on the following themes (Find a full listing of focus group questions below):

- Parents’ perceptions of factors associated with being sanctioned or leaving CalWORKs, e.g., barriers to participation in GAIN such as participant knowledge of the sanction process and personal problems affecting compliance.

- Parents' perceptions of program effects or factors that are associated with their noncompliance and leaving GAIN, such as not receiving notices on time, casework, and service issues.
- Factors affecting noncompliance that are associated with different sanction histories and leaving patterns.
- Participants' perceptions of problems associated with their noncompliance.
- Participant recommendations for how sanctions might be employed more effectively.

Researchers directed questions toward eliciting informal discussion that would encourage participants to talk about their perceptions and experiences of these issues. Participants were reminded of the purpose of the questions and that what they said in the groups would be written into a report but that nothing they said would be attributed to them directly. Each person was encouraged to respond to all questions. The range of responses suggests that participants felt that they could be candid in voicing their experiences and perceptions.

All groups, except the Spanish-speaking participant focus group, were conducted in English. Responses from the focus groups were transcribed by an independent transcription service, and Spanish-speaking focus group findings were translated into English. Researchers coded and analyzed transcripts from the focus group interviews for themes related to the study objectives, and responses that represent the range of participant responses were included in the report.

## **C.4 Focus Group Questions for all Participants**

### **Introduction**

Welcome. As parents in CalWORKs, you have been invited here to participate in a study about the County of Los Angeles' Welfare-to-Work program. DPSS wants to find ways to increase the involvement of parents like you in GAIN activities and services designed to help them move from welfare to economic independence.

In particular, the County would like to reduce the number of parents who drop out or who, for some reason, do not attend required activities or follow the requirements of the program and, as a consequence, are sanctioned or are in noncompliance and at risk of being sanctioned and losing the adult portion of their cash aid.

You have been randomly selected to attend this discussion group because at some point in your relations with CalWORKs and GAIN, you have been sanctioned or were at risk of being sanctioned for not following the programs rules.



The purpose of this meeting is to understand your experiences with being in noncompliance and sanctioned and to ask you to make recommendations about ways in which the situation can be avoided or stopped (“cured”) so that more parents can participate in GAIN and get the most out of the Welfare-to-Work program.

We are not here to judge you in any way but to listen to your stories and learn from your experience in order to improve the GAIN program and the lives of parents like you. Please feel free to express your opinions honestly and openly.

- Assurance of confidentiality.
- Filling out the consent form and signing for the food certificate.
- The focus group rules of procedure: Speak one at a time; give other people time to speak; give your first name when you speak.

Getting to know each other: information about you, your family, welfare, work situation.

First, let’s go around the table and get acquainted. Tell us your name and about the adults and children who are living in your household and a little about your background.

1. Currently, in addition to yourself, how many people are covered by CalWORKs aid under your name? How many children are in your family? How many people live in your household?
2. In what year did you first begin receiving aid from CalWORKs? What was your last CalWORKs activity?
3. In the past three years, has your cash aid been reduced, or were you told that it might be reduced? Do you know why? If they don’t mention sanctions, ask: Were you ever told that you stopped receiving aid because you were not in compliance with GAIN requirements or that you might stop receiving aid because you were not in compliance with GAIN requirements? How many times, and what was the reason each time?
4. What rules were you told that you violated?

Knowledge about the meaning of noncompliance and sanctions, experience of being at risk for sanctions and experiencing the sanctioning process, and how to be in compliance and restore cash benefits

1. Tell us in your own words what that led to your being in noncompliance or sanctioned. Give us a little history about what happened starting from the time you were first notified of noncompliance to any actions you or your case worker took afterwards to communicate with each other, investigate “good cause” for the sanction, appeal the sanction; or move to develop a work plan and reinstate aid.

If not covered in the narrative above, probe for:

- a. When did sanctions occur, that is, at what point in contact with GAIN?
- b. Why were you sanctioned (i.e., what rule did you violate)?
- c. Did you realize you were violating GAIN rules, and understand the reason for your sanction—had the rules ever been explained to you?
- d. What happened that you were unable to follow GAIN rules or why did you decide that it was in your interest not to follow them? For example, didn't know the rules, didn't receive the Notice of Action far enough ahead of the deadline for contacting your GSW to talk about it, had a good cause for not following the rules (including serious personal problems like substance abuse (SA), domestic violence (DV), mental health (MH), which needed treatment, transportation or child care problems), decided that you and family were better off not participating and taking the financial loss?
- e. How did you find out that you were violating the rule? Describe the conversations with GSWs and what happened? Did you receive the Notice of Action 20 days before the deadline for contacting your worker, and did you contact your case worker within 20 days after you received the Notice of Action? Was the notice written in the language that you speak? Was the notice easy or difficult to understand?
- f. Did you try to explain to your GSW the circumstances that led to your sanctions—what happened? How do you feel about what happened? Do you think the GSW treated you fairly? Did you know that you could appeal the sanction? If so, how did you learn about it?
- g. Did you try to appeal the sanction—did you talk to anyone or ask anyone for assistance and what happened? Did you feel the process was fair? Did you feel that anyone really listened to you and understood your situation and your side of the story?
- h. What did your worker say that you had to do to remove or to avoid the sanction? Did you try to do what s/he said you needed to do? If not, why not? If you managed to remove the sanction, how did you do that?
- i. Did you develop a compliance plan and return to compliance with GAIN rules? How difficult or easy was it to follow? Did you think about leaving CalWORKs? Explain what happened.
- j. Do you think that you will be able to avoid sanctions in the future? How? Did receiving a sanction or being told that you might receive a sanction help you to avoid sanctions in the future?
- k. What could GAIN do to help you avoid sanctions in the future?
- l. Did you ever wonder about the meaning of the following terms? Were they explained to you?
  - Compliance
  - Good Cause
  - Sanction
  - Notice of Action
  - Compliance Plan

## Conclusions and Overall View of Sanctions

1. Sanctions are designed to encourage parents on aid to fulfill their Welfare-to-Work plans so that they can reach self-sufficiency under welfare reform. Overall, do you feel that sanctions are an effective means of encouraging parents like yourself to participate in Welfare-to-Work programs and to reach self-sufficiency? In your experience, have sanctions, or the threat of sanctions, motivated you to stay in the GAIN program and take advantage of its services?
2. Is there any kind of assistance that you could have been given that would have helped you to avoid sanctions or noncompliance with requirements? For example, could your sanctions have been avoided if you had been given more information about sanctions, adequate child support, and access to supportive services like MH, SA, and DV? Is there any kind of assistance that might help you to avoid sanctions in the future?
3. From your experiences, what recommendations would you make to reduce sanctions and increase the participation of parents in GAIN activities and services? Probe: Is it a matter of getting more knowledge about the rules; better notification of noncompliance; better communication with your case workers; more information about the process of appealing a sanction or ending it by finding a way to comply with the rules, or asking for more help in overcoming personal problems that led to noncompliance in the first place?

We thank you for telling us about your experiences and we welcome your recommendations.

## C.5 Additional Questions for Leavers

- I. Why did you leave GAIN and CalWORKs and give up the aid and services it can provide?

Let's ask first the parents who were SANCTIONED, then those who were compliant at the time of leaving GAIN? Why? Because the County is interested in knowing more about the impact of sanctions, whether they motivate people to conform to the program and constitute a reason for leaving the program.

1. What were your reasons for leaving the GAIN program?
  - a. No longer needed the support (Why?)
  - b. Your needs not being met (What and why not being met?)
  - c. Personal problems (What? Could GAIN have helped?)
  - d. Problems with GSW, EWs (What?)
  - e. Problems with the requirements like Job Club, work hours
  - f. Difficulty complying and facing sanctions
  - g. A combination of factors

2. Was being sanctioned an important part of your reason for leaving? Explain why or why not? (If “yes” probe about the sanction and its impact. Did you understand why you were sanctioned; were there problems with the program and GSWs or personal barriers that caused your sanction or made it difficult to comply. Also, what was the impact of sanctions on your family: food shortage, problems paying rent, utilities, or affording basic necessities like clothes and shoes? Caused stress in me and family members? How did you manage financially?) If time, use detailed standard questions about sanctions.

(Now let’s ask people who were compliant and not sanctioned when they left GAIN.)

3. What were your reasons for leaving the GAIN program?
    - a. No longer needed the support (Why?)
    - b. Your needs not being met (What and why not being met?)
    - c. Personal problems (What? Could GAIN have helped?)
    - d. Problems with GSW, EWs (What?)
    - e. Problems with the requirements like Job Club, work hours
    - f. Difficulty complying and facing sanctions
    - g. A combination of factors
  4. Had you been sanctioned before? For what? What was your experience with sanctions? Was it a reason for leaving the program?
- II. Your Current Situation: Are you doing better financially and personally since you left GAIN, worse off, doing about the same?
1. Are you currently receiving any aid like Food Stamps, housing assistance, child care, health assistance like Medi-Cal or Healthy Families, etc.? Do you know that you may be eligible for these benefits without being in GAIN?
  2. Are you or the adult members of your family currently looking for work, employed, going to school, or in a job-training program?
    - a. If so, explain what you are doing and whether it is part or full time. Does it pay adequately for your needs and provide some benefits like health or child care?
    - b. If not working, are you looking for work or intending to get more education or training?
  3. Do you have adequate housing for your family? Explain. What are your living arrangements (own apartment, house, share house or apartment)? Do you receive housing support?
  4. Are you having difficulty making ends meet? What are your strategies for stretching your income and meeting your needs?

5. Would you say that you are doing better or worse financially or about the same since you left GAIN? Are you making ends meet? Explain.
6. In what ways—positive or negative—has your decision to leave GAIN, affected your life and that of your family? For example, did leaving GAIN have an impact on whether or not and how much you worked or stayed home to take care of your children? Did it affect your family's health and other needs, or relations between adults and children?
7. Are you optimistic about your future and that of your family?
8. Are there any particular problems, financial, health or otherwise that interfere with your chances of getting ahead?
9. If you have any of these problems, are you getting help to deal with any of them? What? Would you like to get some help?

### III. Evaluating Your Experience in GAIN: the positives and negatives.

1. Have you ever regretted your decision about leaving GAIN and thought about reapplying for aid under GAIN?
2. Is there anything else you could tell us that might help DPSS understand why parents like you leave the GAIN Program?
3. From your experience as a leaver is there anything in the program from your experience that has really helped you and encouraged you to participate and take advantage of the program and the services it offers?
4. From your experience is there anything about the program that discouraged you from participating or made it difficult for you to participate. What were the pluses and minuses for you and your family for participating in GAIN?
5. What about the case of sanctions, did they motivate you to comply with GAIN requirements or encourage you to drop out of the program?

### IV. At this point in your life what do you need most to get ahead for yourself and your family? What aid and support would help you accomplish this?

(Comment on Leaver Questionnaire: In the focus group, these questions were used as guides and probes when parents' narratives about why they left and how they were doing since did not cover these issues. The standard questions regarding sanctions and barriers to compliance were also explored both for parents who were sanctioned when they left and those who left while compliant. All had experienced sanctions.)

## GLOSSARY

Term	Actual Title	Definitions
CalWORKs	California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids program	California's implementation of TANF cash assistance. Features work requirements, time limits, etc.
CAO	Chief Administrative Office	The CAO develops recommendations on fiscal and policy matters for the Board of Supervisors, provides effective leadership of the County organization in carrying out the Board's policy decisions, and ensures financial stability.
Caseload		The number of cases.
Case Worker		The Eligibility Workers (EWs) and the GAIN Services Workers (GSWs).
Compliance		When a participant follows all the rules of CalWORKs, such as participation in Job Club and Orientation, which are required by the County welfare office.
Compliance plan		A plan developed for the participants, so that they are able to comply with the GAIN programs requirements, and become compliant.
CDSS	California State Department of Social Services	The State agency that oversees Social Services.
Cure		This term is used to refer to lifting a sanction.
DPSS	Department of Public Social Services	County of Los Angeles agency delivering administering social services, including CalWORKs, Food Stamps, and Medi-Cal.
Exempt	Exempt GAIN participants	A GAIN participant who was granted an exemption from Welfare-to-Work activities. Such an exemption is granted if the participant is less than 18 years or 60 or more years old, mentally or physically incapacitated, pregnant, providing continuous care for an ill household member, or caring for a child under one year of age.
Exemption	GAIN participants meet one or more of the exemption criteria	When the GAIN participants meets one or more of the following criteria: age less than 18 years or 60 or more years, mentally or physically incapacitated, pregnant, providing continuous care for an ill household member, or caring for a child under one year of age, the Welfare-to-Work plan is waived, as well as GAIN activities. The 18/24-month time clock will not run. Once they no longer meet the exemption criteria, the clock will start again.
GAIN	Greater Avenues for Independence	County of Los Angeles Welfare-to-Work program.
GAIN Region	GAIN locations by Non-Contract and Contract Areas	Regional GAIN offices.
GC	Good Cause	When a participant presents a "good" reason which prevented her/him from compliance with one, or more, of the required GAIN activities.

Term	Actual Title	Definitions
GEARS	GAIN Employment and Activity Reporting System	The computer system used for tracking GAIN participants.
Household Size		The number of persons in a household.
Index	Plural indices	An index is the series of values of a variable such as the number of sanctioned participants that show the ratio of this variable to the level observed in a base time period. The index values are calculated for each month by dividing the variable value in a given month by the value of the variable in the base month. The vertical axis can be interpreted as percentages. For example, 1.05 is equal to a five percent increase over the base time period (which is 1).
LEADER	Los Angeles Eligibility, Automated Determination, Evaluation and Reporting	New system replacing CDMS, IBPS, and WCMIS; began operational testing on May 3, 1999, in one office.
N	Number of observations	Number of GAIN participants, in most cases.
Noncompliance		When a participant does not comply with one or more of the GAIN program components or activities, they are said to be in noncompliance.
Noncompliance rate		The noncompliance rate for a given month is calculated as follows: Noncompliant Participants divided by Enrolled participants in the given month.
Mandatory	Mandatory GAIN participants	The GAIN participants who do not meet any of the exemption criteria.
Mean	Arithmetic mean	The mean is the sum of all the scores divided by the number of scores.
Pre-reform	Pre-reform	GAIN participants who have at least one quarter of registration prior to the implementation of the CalWORKs version of GAIN, or April 1998, combined with at least one quarter of GAIN registration in the specific year analyzed.
Post-reform	Post-reform	Post-reform participants have at least one quarter of GAIN registration in the specific year under analysis, with no history of reform before April 1998.
PT	Participant	In this study, refers to a GAIN participant.
RES	Research and Evaluation Services	RES is a unit within the CAO Service Integration Branch. RES is responsible for the evaluation of CalWORKs in the County of Los Angeles of which this report is a part.
Response Rate		The proportion of all those who responded to the survey to the number of participants in the sample.
Sanction		When a participant does not comply with the GAIN program requirements, their cash aid may be reduced or stopped, until they provide a good reason for their noncompliance or start complying with the GAIN requirement which they failed to meet.

Term	Actual Title	Definitions
Sanction rate		The sanction rate for a given month is calculated as follows: Sanctioned participants in a certain month/ Sanctioned + Enrolled participants in the given month.
Sanction status		The status of a GAIN participant, either sanctioned (i.e. cash aid is stopped or reduced) or non-sanctioned.
SIB	Service Integration Branch	Branch of the County of Los Angeles Chief Administrative Office created in 2000 to support and coordinate collaborative policy development initiatives; assist County departments integrate service delivery systems; and help provide children and families with needed information.
SIP	Self-initiated programs	Vocational and educational programs that GAIN participants choose, in lieu of Job Clubs.
Specialized Supportive Services		These are supportive services for domestic violence, substance abuse and mental health.



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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> See Moreno, Manuel et al. 2005

<sup>2</sup> The sanction rate for a given month ( $t$ ) is calculated as follows: Sanctioned participants in month ( $t$ ) / Sanctioned Participants in month ( $t$ ) + Enrolled participants in month ( $t$ ).

<sup>3</sup> The noncompliance rate for a given month is calculated as follows: Noncompliant Participants in month ( $t$ ) divided by Enrolled participants in month ( $t$ ). A participant is assumed to be noncompliant when her/his noncompliance is discovered in a given month even if the noncompliance is resolved later during the same month. This is different than the definition applied by the Department in its published reports, where noncompliant participants are only those who stay noncompliant in a given month and fail to participate in an activity. These published rates are approximately half the rates shown in Figure 2.1.

<sup>4</sup> Each line represents the percent change in the number of participants in that category (for example, the number enrolled) relative to the number of participants in the same category during the first quarter of 2004. Each line is therefore constructed by taking the first quarter of 2004 as the base period and calculating the percent change between this base period and the subsequent months.

<sup>5</sup> This variable is calculated for each month as follows: The number of participants who become noncompliant in month ( $t$ ) and then get sanctioned within the next three months / the total number of participants who become noncompliant in month ( $t$ ).

<sup>6</sup> The percent of first-time sanctioned participants is the ratio of participants who have become sanctioned for the first time in the given month ( $t$ ) to the number of all sanctioned participants in the same month ( $t$ ).

<sup>7</sup> The proportion of multiple sanctions in a given month ( $t$ ) is calculated as follows: the number of sanctioned participants in month ( $t$ ) who are in their second or third sanction instances / the total number of sanctioned participants in month ( $t$ ).

<sup>8</sup> The average sanction duration is computed as follows: The accumulated sanction durations are calculated for each sanctioned participant for all the months during which they are sanctioned. The sanction duration starts from zero for each sanction instance that the participants experience. Then for each month the average of these cumulative sanction durations is calculated.

<sup>9</sup> Table 2.1 illustrates the characteristics of over 30,000 participants who entered CalWORKs between January 2003 and December 2004 and stayed in CalWORKs for at least 6 months.

<sup>10</sup> Chronically sanctioned families have higher numbers of aided kids relative to other groups.

<sup>11</sup> Contract regions include regions 2 and 7, which were administered by ACS and Maximus during the study period.

<sup>12</sup> Variants of these competing hypotheses have been tested in a handful of other articles, the most convincing of which is a piece by Hasenfeld, Ghose and Larson in *Social Service Review*, based on analysis of administrative and survey data for the state of California. See Hasenfeld et al. 2004.

<sup>13</sup> See Cherlin et al. 2002, Kalil et.al. 2002, Reichman et.al. 2005,

<sup>14</sup> However, it should be noted that income data is based on reported income derived from administrative records which is likely to underestimate the total household income.

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<sup>15</sup> See Cherlin et.al. 2002, Danziger and Seefeldt 2002, Kalil et.al. 2002, Lee et.al. 2004, Lens 2006, Moreno et.al.2005, Pavetti et.al. 2003, Pavetti et al. 2004 and Wu et al. 2004.

<sup>16</sup> See Moreno Manuel et al. 2005.

<sup>17</sup> The differences in education levels between never-sanctioned and short term sanction participants are not statistically significant, while the differences in education levels between chronically sanctioned and both short-term sanction and chronically sanction participants are statistically significant.

<sup>18</sup> Since the majority of sanctioned participants are sanctioned for the first time after missing their Orientation following their enrollment in GAIN, they do not have adequate time to be employed while they are in CalWORKs. This data limitation contributes to their low employment rate shown while these participants are in GAIN.

<sup>19</sup> All differences shown in Figure 3.3 are statistically significant.

<sup>20</sup> The difference between chronically sanctioned participants and other groups is statistically significant in terms of the proportions earning an hourly wage of \$8 or more, but the difference between never sanctioned participants and short-term sanction participants is not statistically significant for this comparison.

<sup>21</sup> See CMIH 2000, 2003.

<sup>22</sup> To view these questions themselves, please see questions 48 through 57 in the survey, which is provided in Appendix A. It should be noted that, survey questions are not in any way comparable to screening procedures of DPSS used to identify participants with specialized supportive service needs.

<sup>23</sup> The comparative differences between the three groups are not statistically significant in terms of the need for any of the three specialized supportive services.

<sup>24</sup> The differences between three groups are statistically significant for the use of mental health and domestic violence services as well as use of at least one of the three specialized supportive services.

<sup>25</sup> RES counts participants as homeless or recently homeless when they show a DPSS office or a shelter address in their administrative records during the last two years. However, there are a number of participants who are not homeless even though they show an office address. On the other hand, there is also a group of homeless parents who do not use a office or shelter address and can not be captured from the administrative data. The data needs to be assessed with this limitation. There are only a small fraction of participants that self-declared themselves as homeless in the participant survey.

<sup>26</sup> Homelessness is derived either from the self-declaration of survey respondents or if LEADER data indicates that the participant has used a DPSS district office address. Change of address is collected from LEADER.

<sup>27</sup> Both homelessness and housing instability indicators are significantly higher in statistical terms for the observed sanctioned groups, but the differences between chronically sanctioned and short-term sanction participants are not significant.

<sup>28</sup> The differences between three groups are statistically significant.

<sup>29</sup> In the Figure, one participant may appear more than once, i.e. the columns are not mutually exclusive. For example, the same participant may receive child care and may have not worked due to child care problems in the past.

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<sup>30</sup> It should be noted that the distribution of responses to child care questions for short-term sanction participants resemble those of never-sanctioned participants. While differences in the response distributions between chronically sanctioned participants and the other two groups observed in this study are statistically significant, differences between never-sanctioned and short-term sanction participants are not significant. The only exception is the need for child care assistance—all three groups are found to have similar need levels.

<sup>31</sup> See Moreno Manuel, et al. 2005.

<sup>32</sup> In Figure 3.9, the column *Received Child Care* shows the proportion of participants that used child care services relative to all participants in each sub-group—chronically sanctioned, short-term sanction, and never sanctioned. On the other hand, the column *% Received Child Care among those Needed* reveals the proportion of *survey respondents* that used child care. The denominator in this latter column therefore consists only of respondents who self-declared their need for child care in the survey.

<sup>33</sup> In Figure 3.10, the column *Received Transportation Assistance* shows the proportion of participants that received these services relative to all participants in each sub-group—chronically sanctioned, short-term sanction, and never sanctioned. On the other hand, the title *% Received Transportation Assistance among those Needed* reveals the proportion of *survey respondents* that used transportation assistance. The denominator in this latter column therefore consists only of respondents who self-declared their need for transportation assistance in the survey.

<sup>34</sup> In looking at the use of transportation services, the differences between all three groups are statistically significant except the difference between never sanctioned and short-term sanction participants.

<sup>35</sup> Differences between chronically sanctioned participants and short-term sanction participants are statistically significant for this question, with the exception of the proportions in each group of participants who failed to reach their GSWs after becoming sanctioned.

<sup>36</sup> See Moreno Manuel, et al. 2006.

<sup>37</sup> All differences between three groups in Figure x8 are statistically significant.

<sup>39</sup> The non-compliance duration includes the time when a participant is sanctioned and the average duration refers to the average duration of all non-compliance incidences.

<sup>39</sup> The average sanction duration refers to the average of the total time spent while being sanctioned through the date of survey interview. However, it should be noted that these findings are direct results of how these groups are defined.

<sup>40</sup> Odds ratios simply show the odds of one event relative to the odds of another event occurring. For example, the first odds ratio in model I (1.25) shows that the odds of becoming chronically sanctioned are 1.25 times higher for participants who are unaware of sanction rules. See Appendix B for a detailed explanation of odds-ratios.

<sup>41</sup> The column labeled as “Pr >  $\chi^2$ ” refers to the p-values showing the level at which coefficients are significant. If the p-value is less than or equal to .10, then the variable is accepted as statistically significant. See Appendix B for details of statistical significance.

<sup>42</sup> As expected, a separate run showed that participants without a high school degree are 59 percent more likely to become chronically sanctioned relative to those with some college education or more.

<sup>43</sup> The odds ratios are .47 and .54 for the first and second model respectively.

<sup>44</sup> Odds ratios are .58 and .63 for two models.

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<sup>45</sup> These findings require further research to verify these explanations.

<sup>46</sup> These findings require further research to verify these explanations.

<sup>47</sup> The odds ratios of the child care barrier for the second model are 1.3 and 1.25 respectively.

<sup>48</sup> It should be noted that since the survey sample was not stratified by ethnicity and selected only English and Spanish speaking participants, results connected to the ethnicity variable should be observed with caution. See Appendix B for the limitations of the survey data and sample selection methods.

<sup>49</sup> Comparisons of African Americans to white participants also confirm that English-speaking white participants are more likely relative to African Americans to become chronically sanctioned.

<sup>50</sup> Household definitions include both aided and unaided persons. These two findings show that the impact of an additional aided person in the household is more pronounced than that of an unaided person in the household. Since all households surveyed had a minimum of two aided persons, additional aided persons refer to the impact of additional household members receiving aid.

<sup>51</sup> A separate run comparing the short-term sanction group with never sanctioned participants showed that participants are 5 times more likely to be short-term sanction participants when they have experienced more than one noncompliance incident.

<sup>52</sup> Contract regions include regions 2 and 7, which were administered by ACS and Maximus during the study period.

<sup>53</sup> More complex analysis is required to draw conclusions regarding the differences between regions or districts in terms of sanctioning patterns. There are factors specific to different regions that would affect the results which can not be assessed with the models used in this study.

<sup>54</sup> See Moreno et al (2005).

<sup>55</sup> See Moreno et al. (2000).

<sup>56</sup> The reason for selecting April 2002 is due to the data limitation. Since the sanction data prior to April 2002 is not accurate, including for participants who were in CalWORKs before this date, and would create serious data problems when determining the sanction status of participants.

<sup>57</sup> See An, A and Watts, D. 1998

<sup>58</sup> Other post-stratification weights such as ethnicity and age were also used to test the impact of more detailed stratification on the estimates generated by regression models. However, the results were almost the same confirming that the distribution of participants by additional factors was not significantly different between the sample and the population. Hence, for simplicity only the sanction status stratum was adopted in regression models.

<sup>59</sup> Response rate is calculated by dividing the total number of respondents with the total number of respondents and non-respondents.

<sup>60</sup> A different weighting scheme was also used to compensate for non-response by adjusting base weights with weighted response rates. The results were almost identical.

<sup>61</sup> See Allison, Paul D. 1999.

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